

REAGIN, TIMOTHY MITCHELL, Ph.D. North Carolina, Claude Kitchin, and The Great War, 1869-1923. (2020)
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This dissertation investigates the state of North Carolina in the years before American intervention in the Great War by focusing on the actions, speeches, and writings of House Majority Leader Claude Kitchin. Despite his importance to such a pivotal decade in American history, Kitchin is a largely forgotten figure today. He worked to prevent the United States from entering the war but ultimately failed in this task. Other prominent figures are usually given credit as the loudest and most influential voices of opposition, but Kitchin excelled in this role. From his not so humble origins, he emerged as a leader of an anti-war preparedness movement at a time when so many Americans were pushing the country closer to the war. Kitchin worked around the clock to convince his own constituents, as well as Americans from around the country, that the United States was already well-prepared to face the challenges of a world at war.

President Wilson called for a national campaign of war preparedness years before the United States was even at war. And because the Atlantic Ocean proved to be such a good barrier between the Old and New Worlds many of Kitchin's contemporaries argued for tremendous increases in naval expenditures. Kitchin took particular issue with these demands for a dramatic naval build up and consistently reminded the nation that the United States already had the best navy in the world, behind Great Britain's. "We are already prepared," he often said.

When it became clear that Kitchin was on the losing side of the fight, he stuck to his convictions and delivered an inspiring speech on the House floor hours before the

vote for war. He knew this vote might signal the death knell of his political career but could only vote how his conscience allowed. After the declaration, he worked to protect the American people from overpaying for the war. He determined that if big businesses would profit from it, then they should pay for it. And he followed this policy until the war ended. After peace was declared and the Republicans took back Congress, he quietly faded out of the public view but never stopped working.

NORTH CAROLINA, CLAUDE KITCHIN, AND THE GREAT WAR, 1869-1923

by

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To Owen

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE GREAT WAR

WAR CLOUD COVERS ALL EUROPE AND HUGE FORCES ARE MOVING.

--*Charlotte Daily Observer*, July 25, 1914

In 1914, no one in North Carolina could imagine that a confusing assassination that happened some five thousand miles away would have such a profound and dramatic impact on their own lives. Some would be shocked when news of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the ancient Hapsburg throne, reached the Old North State, but many more would be indifferent. The complicated Old-World politics of the July Crisis and ensuing months that ensured a lengthy and bloody war would take place seemed to be run-of-the-mill for Europeans who had a very long, and very recent, history of regional conflict. In the first years of the war, few Americans could see any benefit from military involvement. Eventually, certain instances, such as the sinking of cargo ships with American citizens on board, caused moments of panic. It seems, however, that the state of North Carolina had resigned itself to entering the war even before the declaration in April 1917. Both governors Locke Craig and Thomas Bickett responded to President Woodrow Wilson's requests for war preparedness measures with some degree of enthusiasm.

Whether or not the United States should enter into the Great War would become a hotly debated topic around the country. The war started in a corner of the world that few Americans were aware of. Immigrants and the children of immigrants from both sides of

the conflict populated the United States, but very few actively advocated on either side of the debate, based on their heritage. North Carolina was economically benefitting from the war after a worrisome opening outlook. The war enabled the state to bring some of its agriculture and industry into the new century. The president implored his citizens to remain neutral in their thoughts and actions and many did. However, there was a careful balancing act to play to achieve this objective, and true neutrality was difficult to come by.

The stage was set for the great debate of American entry into the World War. One Tar Heel emerged as an integral component to lead the debate: Claude Kitchin. He remained relatively quiet on the subject in the first years of the war. After all, it was still a European war at that point. But when President Wilson began moving the country closer to the brink of war during his preparedness campaigns, Kitchin became one of his loudest and most influential opponents. Scholars note that North Carolina's role in the Great War saga makes up only a single chapter in the history of the American war experience. However, Kitchin's voice merits its own chapter in the ordeal. "Kitchinism" eventually entered the political vocabulary to indicate the antiwar dialect of southern, progressive Democrats.¹

The history of American involvement in the Great War before and after the official declaration of war came in April of 1917 has come back to popular discussion over the last decade, owing in large part to many recent centennial celebrations that

¹ Jessica Bandel, *North Carolina and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), vi-vii; David Traxel, *Crusader Nation: The United States in Peace and the Great War, 1898-1920* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 286.

marked the conclusion of the war. North Carolina, in particular, has seen a rise in museum exhibits and public interest of the state's role in the war. The state's Department of Natural and Cultural Resources ran an online blog with a kind of "100 years ago today" posting. The state museum had a well-attended exhibition of North Carolina's role in the war. This dissertation joins in these efforts by exploring North Carolina's role in the years leading to American entry to the war. It explores preparations for entering the Great War before the United States was officially involved, the key political figures who voiced opposition to entry, the national war-preparedness campaign from the point of view of Claude Kitchin, and the state's role after the declaration of war in 1917. Much of the viewpoint comes from House Majority Leader Claude Kitchin, a Democrat from the second district of North Carolina, who was one of the most influential figures in America during one of its most trying international ordeals.

In this dissertation, I use the terms "Great War" and "World War" more than "World War I" or "the First World War," as this is what contemporaries would have called it. Of course, individual nations have different names for the war. The British generally referred to the "Great War," while Germans often used "*Weltkrieg*" (World War). The United States seemed to interchange between "Great War," probably because of the Anglophone influence, and "World War" after initially referring to the "European War." Similarly, Francophones called it "*La Grand Guerre*" (The Great War), before interchanging the term with "World War." For the sake of breaking up monotony or to keep consistent with any sources being cited, I occasionally use the terms "World War I" or "the First World War."

Historians such as C. Vann Woodward have often noted that Tom Watson became *the* voice of southern opposition to American involvement in the Great War. While Watson was a significant and remarkably influential voice in the anti-war movement, recognition of him as the “loudest” voice does not complete the story. In a recent article written for *The Journal of Southern History*, historian Zachary Smith summed it up, “As [Jeanette] Keith, [Anthony] Gaughan, and others have made clear, Watson may have been the loudest and most persistent voice of discontent.” Smith mentioned that Claude Kitchin was another “popular southern Democratic politician” but maintained that Watson had been the major southern opponent of preparedness. The problem with this line of thinking, though, is that Watson was in no position of real authority to challenge President Wilson in the prewar period. Watson was in the House decades earlier and did not enter the Senate until after the war ended. For this reason, and many others, it is important to reevaluate this period of American history.²

Representative Claude Kitchin, on the other hand, was the loudest and most influential voice of the anti-preparedness and anti-war groups in the United States between 1914 and 1917 from a position of high political power. The Office of the House Majority Leader has been described as second in power only to the president. Kitchin worked to educate his own constituents as well as Americans around North Carolina and nationwide about the dangers of a dramatic and large peace-time army and naval buildup. Kitchin argued that this would set a dangerous precedent that would lead to renewed

² Zachary Smith, “Tom Watson and Resistance to Federal War Policies in Georgia during World War I,” *The Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 2 (2012): 296.

industrial militarism in the immediate and distrustful aftermath of the war, as most of Europe would look to the United States as an example. When Congress voted to declare war on Germany in April 1917, Kitchin shifted his focus to financially supporting the war from his position in the House despite his never-ending opposition to a war which he called unjust and abominable.

Kitchin's correspondence with his fellow politicians, as well as the countless letters of support that he received regarding the president's preparedness program from North Carolinians are essential pieces of evidence, which demonstrate the Tar Heel state's reluctance to become involved in the war. Many state residents did not believe that it was necessary for the safety or prosperity of the United States to get involved and made their support known to Kitchin. The balance tipped in favor of anti-preparedness and anti-war. Despite his grand accomplishments and grander failures during this pivotal time in American history, Kitchin is remarkably unknown today. Though the centennial events of the last decade marking the beginning, middle, and end of the Great War, many have collectively forgotten, or chosen not to remember, the voices of opposition who loudly detested our involvement in "the most destructive war known in the history of mankind." Too often these dissidents are lumped together in a category of conscientious objectors, slackers, and cowards. This dissertation argues that Kitchin, and many North Carolinians like him who opposed American involvement in the war, were integral to the complete story of this period. Kitchin rode a wave of white supremacy to political power and became one of the most powerful congressional wartime leaders in American history.

This dissertation joins the ranks of thesis-centered biographies that bring important, but often forgotten, Americans into the spotlight and highlight their central roles in effecting America's foreign and domestic policy. Countless biographies have been written and much ink has been spilled over American war heroes and politicians who led the country into the Great War. Similarly, tome-length works on combat, strategy, and tactics are innumerable. My work on Kitchin will push historiography in a new direction by illuminating the contributions of a figure from the other side, a powerful voice that fought against American entry to the World War.³

Jennifer Keene's 2016 article in *The Historian* detailed the historiography of the First World War in the United States. She noted that "the number of dedicated World War I historians remains quite small within the United States," and many historians who write about the war position their works in subfields, such as African American, military, or labor history. In closing, she writes, "World War I does not hold their interest for very long." This article explains that most of the major works on the United States in the Great War, beyond the studies from military historians and "buffs" who explain the strategies of individual units, are done from a macro perspective. In other words, it seems that historians have offered arguments on wide ranging issues concerning this topic, but there is very little in the way of investigation at the state or local level, especially from the voices of opposition. Even more recent historiography complements this thesis. A recent set of essays collected in *North Carolina's Experience during the First World War* cover

³ Bruce Dierenfield, *Keeper of the Rules: Congressman Howard W. Smith of Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987); Douglas B. Craig, *Progressives at War: William G. McAdoo and Newton D. Baker, 1863-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

topics from the military, politics, business and labor, memory, and the “home front” but they all lack any significant detail or attention to opposition. This extends that narrative that we live with today, that the United States would automatically enter the war at some point. Nearly every essay in this anthology pays minor service to Americans in opposition to the war, including Kitchin, but there are no dedicated entries about the voices of opposition.⁴

Similarly, North Carolina’s role in the Great War “makes up a single chapter in the history of the American war experience,” according to Jessica Bandel in one of the most recent books on the World War. “In many ways,” she continued, “that role is no different than the overall experience.” The rest of her introduction recounts the standard narrative of North Carolina’s role in the war. She asserts that before the war, the populace generally supported neutrality, but once war was declared, they changed their views to support the United States engaging in Europe, “with few exceptions.” The shift in feeling from neutrality to support was not as simple as the story we have been told suggests, but it is still accepted by the current historical community.⁵

Other books that concern the Great War and United States are almost always from a macro level perspective. Many historians have written about the changing nature of the

⁴ Jennifer Keene, “Remembering the ‘Forgotten War’: American Historiography on World War I,” *The Historian* 78, no.3 (September 1, 2016): 467; Shepherd W. McKinley and Steven Sabol eds., *North Carolina’s Experience during the First World War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018).

⁵ Bandel, *North Carolina*, vi. This book is more of an introduction-level text for people who may not be familiar with the war. As for citations, it has little beyond source suggestions at the end, but it illustrates the conventional narrative of North Carolina’s role in the Great War. For the most recent example of this view of North Carolina’s role, see James W. Hall, “The Last War of Honor: Manhood, Race, Gender, Class and Conscription in North Carolina During the First World War” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2019).

United States on the federal level in direct relation to the war and the increasing demands of a country on the brink of entering the war, such as Jennifer Keene's *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America*, Ronald Schaffer's *America in the Great War*, Ellis Hawley's *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, and David M. Kennedy's *Over Here*. Scholars have also noted how southern state power expanded in the years prior to American entry, such as Jeanette Keith in *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight*.⁶

The motivations behind American entry into the Great War have been the subject of much historiographical debate in the last century. One of the earliest schools of thought formulated by Charles Seymour in 1921 argued that the war was forced upon Wilson and the United States by the German disregard for neutral shipping rights. This argument continues to hold merit as many students learn about the sinking of various British and American ships under Germany's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare as the leading cause of the United States' declaration of war.⁷

A second school of thought regarding the historiographical debate emerged in the 1930s and attributed the declaration to economic interests, Allied propaganda, and Wilson's personal bias towards the Allied nations, especially Great Britain. Once the

⁶ Jennifer Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Ellis W. Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Jeanette Keith, *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class, and Conscription in the Rural South during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁷ Charles Seymour, *Woodrow Wilson and the World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1921).

Second World War began, historians have maintained that Wilson demanded American security and for that reason had to go to war. By the 1950s, writers, most especially Arthur Link, returned to the unrestricted warfare on the high seas as the major cause but also included the economic, political, and idealistic reasons. New Left historians in the 1960s made note of the American fear of Russian Bolshevism and German imperialism as major factors. More recent historiography has combined many of these elements but extends the argument that Wilson had the goal of promoting progressive principles world-wide through involvement in the peace-making process when the war ended.⁸

The current historiography of the Great War, as a whole, is best detailed in *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, written by Jay Winter and Antoine Prost. They argue that books and films about WWI can be grouped into three distinct generations. The first is what they call the Generation of '35, who understood the war in a nineteenth-century context, meaning top-down history, focused on the generals, the battle plans, and general military history. The second generation described by Winter and Prost were the witnesses of the Second World War. They wanted to understand the First World War through everyday people such as workers, civilians, and soldiers because the experience of seeing another world war drove them to see the “human face” of war. The third generation Prost and Winter noted turned to cultural and micro history. Prost and Winter argued that regardless of the generation,

⁸ N. Gordon Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1-10; Charles Seymour, *American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935).

there were three big questions about the war for everyone: First, why and how did it break out? Second, how was it conducted? And third, what were its consequences?⁹

When one seeks micro-histories of the First World War, there are many studies of individual American units that served in Europe. In the case of R. Jackson Marshall's *Memories of World War I*, he summarized North Carolinian doughboys' contributions in Europe. Marshall's book is the essential history of the North Carolinians who did go fight in the Great War, while this dissertation looks more to the North Carolinians who did not go to Europe. The battles and battlefield experiences of those who went to war are essential to understand and complete the picture in a project like this. For a more complete picture of the total American experience on the battlefield, Edward Gutiérrez' *Doughboys on the Great War: How American Soldiers Viewed their Military Experience*, is essential. The author's immense research details what American soldiers thought of the war. Gutiérrez took on an impossible task of diving into the heads of soldiers and created a convincing narrative. And, Chad Williams' *Torchbearers of Democracy* explores the African American experience in the war.¹⁰

The following general reference books proved invaluable to find out more about a specific topic concerning American society during the war or about the war itself.

Edward Coffman's *The Regulars* and John Keegan's *The First World War* are the

⁹ Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ R. Jackson Marshall, *Memories of World War I: North Carolina Doughboys on the Western Front* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1998); Edward A. Gutiérrez, *Doughboys on the Great War: How American Soldiers Viewed their Military Experience* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2014); Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Edward Gutierrez cites Williams frequently in his *Doughboys on the Great War*.

standard texts one would consult about the overarching themes, reasons, and conduct of the war, which has been important to my project because I needed to include information about what North Carolinian slackers were avoiding, if that was their reason for slacking. David Kennedy's *Over Here* and Christopher Capozzola's *Uncle Sam Wants You* are the best available books for finding information on the United States home front during the World War.¹¹

The term, "home front" deserves some attention in a project like this one. Most Americans today will readily recognize what a "home front" is in any conflict. Interestingly, the Great War gave the English-speaking world the term "home front," which did not exist in the same way before 1917. The earliest reference to a home front came from the *London Times* in April 1917, and the term did not appear in the United States until 1918. A newspaper editorial had the first reference in North Carolina: "The battle front in Europe is not the only American front. There is a home front, and our people at home should be as patriotic as our men in uniform." Buried in a local newspaper, this reference did not immediately enter the vernacular. Then in 1919 with the publication of *Mr. Punch's History of the Great War*, the term took off. Mr. Punch is a famous English puppet (as well-known to the British as Americans might recognize King Friday XIII from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*) who "saw" his fair share of wars through the second half of the nineteenth century around the British Empire, and in his

¹¹ Edward M Coffman, *The Regulars: The American Army, 1898-1941* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999); Kennedy, *Over Here*; Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Neil A. Wynn, *From Progressivism to Prosperity: World War I and American Society* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), introduction.

later years, documented the Great War. This book introduced the term to Anglophiles in a scene that described the “trials of mistresses on the home front” in Great Britain during the war. Afterwards, this term was applied to those citizens quite literally on the home front.¹²

Regrettably, current scholarship has not yet adequately addressed the voices of opposition on the home front to American entry to the Great War, beyond small references to figures like Kitchin, La Follette, Bryan, and some others. For this reason, many books present their arguments as if there was a foregone conclusion that the United States would automatically ride in and save Europe from itself. As a result, current scholarship characterizes North Carolina as a passively willing participant in an inevitable war. Without a sufficient investigation of those voices of opposition, we undervalue the impact of how tight and contentious the debate concerning American entry to this war was, which ultimately leads to a one-sided conceptualization of the Great War teleologically. North Carolina should make up more than the single chapter that Jessica Bandel mentioned. Kitchin and his supporters deserve a place in the story of North Carolina, the United States, and the Great War. A national sentiment of coerced volunteerism that developed during the president’s preparedness campaigns compelled many people to openly profess support for American entry to the war while they held private reservations about it. Support for the war effort did eventually come from the

¹² *Oxford English Dictionary*, “home front”; Charles L. Graves, *Mr. Punch’s History of the Great War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1919), 19; *Roanoke News*, October 10, 1918.

state but we must always remember that it came with a great deal of personal reluctance, even from Kitchin himself.¹³

“North Carolina, Claude Kitchin, and the Great War, 1869-1923” remedies this gap by analyzing the loudest opponents of the war. Kitchin was not alone in his opposition. Many others, including former state attorney general Theodore Davidson, as well as thousands of their constituents around the Old North State joined their voices to this movement. Often overlooked, the voices of resistance who refused to support Wilson’s war-preparedness campaigns and later, entry to the World War, played an integral role in maintaining America’s moral superiority on the international stage.

This study grew out of an interest surrounding the “excitement,” or lack thereof, of the centennial of American entry to the World War. There are more “popular” wars in American history that many Americans today know much more about. Conversing with undergraduates before a lecture on the Great War will leave a professor or graduate teaching assistant wondering how those students are generally aware of the general causes and outcomes of World War II, but they have little to no idea that there even was a “first” world war. Recent PBS *American Experience* television shows and editorials from various newspapers are hopefully correcting the lack of knowledge concerning the Great War and the United States. One of the goals of this dissertation is to add to this growing understanding of American involvement in the war by uncovering the experiences of

¹³ Richard Lowitt, *George W. Norris: The Persistence of a Progressive, 1913-1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Robert James Maddox, *William E. Borah and American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970); Marc C. Johnson, *Political Hell-Raiser: The Life and Times of Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019); Nancy C. Unger, “The Righteous Reformer: A Life History of Robert M. LaFollette, Sr., 1855-1925” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Southern California, 1985).

North Carolinians during this pivotal time in the nation's history. Most historians are correct when they explain that the Great War changed the very nature of the United States, but they always leave out the importance of opposition to the war.

There are, of course, many treatments of specific groups of opponents of American intervention in the World War. Anti-war protests, movements, and sentiments stretch back to the very foundations of the United States. Dr. Benjamin Rush, a literal Founding Father, published an article in Benjamin Bannecker's *Almanac* calling for a Peace Department to be established in the federal cabinet with power equal to the already established War Department. Organized anti-war movements in the United States began during the War of 1812, led mostly by the Quakers. Religious leaders also took the helm in protesting the Mexican American War in the 1840s and argued against both sides in the Civil War. Few of those anti-war activists thought of themselves as pacifists, though they disagreed with violence and cautioned against imperialism. There were secular figures through the nineteenth century who also argued against war, as they viewed it as detrimental to capitalism.¹⁴

Usually, opposition to American entry to the Great War is explored through the lens of specific groups such as conscientious objectors, pacifists, women's groups, socialists, or others. For example, Frances Early's *A World Without War* explored resistance through the lens of feminism and pacifism in the United States, from those who opposed what they considered the anti-democratic forces of militarism and social

¹⁴ Judith Porter Adams, *Peacework: Oral Histories of Women Peace Activists* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 209; and Charles F. Howlett and Glen Zeiter, *The American Peace Movement: History and Historiography* (Washington D.C.: American Historical Association, 1985), 19; Charles Chatfield, ed., *Peace Movements in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), x.

repression in the country. To state it another way, she investigated resistance through the lens of female activists mostly in the North. Other, large scale treatments of opposition investigate military evasion. Carl Peterson's *Avoidance and Evasion of Military Service* speaks closely to this idea. His is the most comprehensive work on the topic but lacks sufficient detail on this time period. In terms of the Great War, he spent less than ten pages on it, and North Carolina is virtually absent from the whole book.¹⁵

Well into the twenty-first century, many primary sources are available digitally. That convenience sped up the creation of this dissertation immensely. However, not everything is online yet and many papers, posters, and documents are still buried in the archives. The primary material that was consulted for this project fall into both categories. The North Carolina Digital Heritage Center and the Jackson Library at UNC-Greensboro have painstakingly digitized millions of newspaper articles from across the state which make up much of the primary material in this project. These digital sources enrich every chapter in this dissertation. Many federal and state records are also available online, including census material and the *Congressional Record*. Federal census records aided with the background and biography information on the Kitchin family.

UNC Chapel Hill has also collected thousands of documents into an online project titled "Documenting the American South," which provided many of the pamphlets and posters that were consulted in the writing. The writings, speeches, and documents from

¹⁵ Frances H. Early, *A World Without War: How U.C. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted World War I* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Carl L. Peterson Jr., *Avoidance and Evasion of Military Service: An American History, 1626-1973* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1998), introduction; Robert David Johnson, *The Peace Progressives and American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

prominent North Carolinians, including Governors Craig and Bickett made up the majority of primary sources in the second, fifth, and sixth chapters. It is perhaps lucky that most of the writings of the prominent figures on the following pages have been collected and edited into volumes available in libraries.

The Claude Kitchin Papers at the Wilson Library in Chapel Hill are still only available in the archives but proved to be invaluable sources in the second and third chapters. One of Kitchin's secretaries, Mr. S. E. High, magnificently kept records of most of Kitchin's correspondence, especially when Kitchin became a more prominent figure in Washington. Especially after 1914, the collection swells with letters and telegrams to and from Kitchin. Many of the letters sent to his office were mundane and concerned run-of-the-mill congressional requests. However, after Kitchin delivered a big speech or a key event involving the war took place, constituents and other Americans sent their thoughts to him. Those are the papers that ordered this project.

The following pages address five fundamental and related questions about North Carolina's involvement in the Great War: First, how did Claude Kitchin's background and family biography prepare him to become the loudest and most influential voice of opposition to America's entry to the war? Second, how did Kitchin try to keep the United States from overspending on military defense during President Wilson's war-preparedness campaign, and how did he fight against the large peace-time military buildup before 1917? Third, how did Kitchin fight against overspending on the American Navy and how did the United States fare in its "test" of preparedness in Mexico? Fourth, once the war resolution passed, how did Kitchin and the state of North Carolina support

the funding of the war? Finally, how did Kitchin and the state of North Carolina support the war effort when troops were being trained to go “over there?”

This dissertation is divided into six mostly chronological chapters, including this introduction. Each chapter addresses one of the fundamental questions about Claude Kitchin, North Carolina, and the Great War. The second chapter stretches back into North Carolina’s past to bring the Kitchin family to life through the middle of 1915. The third chapter is about war preparedness activities between 1915 and 1916. The fourth covers the major test of preparedness in Mexico but is especially dedicated to naval preparedness and the major reasons that America was drawn into the war between 1916 and 1917. The fifth chapter explains the multitude of methods that the federal government, and Kitchin, used to finance the war from 1917 to 1918. The sixth chapter covers the military and anti-military aspects of North Carolina during the war also in 1917 and 1918. I offer a short conclusion at the end that ties up where Kitchin went after the war.

The second chapter offers a background and biography of Claude Kitchin and a heretofore unrecognized political dynasty. Claude Kitchin was not the first, nor the last, Kitchin to be involved in national politics. His father, William Hodges Kitchin, served in Congress decades before Claude did. His brother, William Walton Kitchin, also played an important role in the state and federal government. Claude Kitchin was hardly alone in Congress as an opponent to American intervention, so there is additional information about some of his progressive allies too. Earlier scholars have written dissertations or master’s theses on some aspect of Kitchin’s life in Congress. I owe their works a

collective debt as my forerunners. Many of these are not available electronically, and every one of them draws on information gathered from previous works, as this dissertation does in part. The most recent published and only biography of Kitchin, *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies*, is quite dated now. It was written by Alex Mathews Arnett, Professor of History at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina (now the University of North Carolina Greensboro), in 1937. Arnett engaged with Kitchin's role as the financial supporter from Congress during the course of the war.¹⁶

One major point to note is that Arnett was not himself very far removed from the ideologies that the Kitchin family held. Claude Kitchin's great-great-granddaughter, Emily R. Rutter, now an assistant professor of English at Ball State University, recently published an article dealing with the family's past and racism in order to compare past troubles with recent events in the South. Rutter described Arnett's work as an "apologist hagiography." She also noted what I have long suspected about the historian who was so close to the man who was his subject: he was a bit of an apologist when it came to the Kitchins' racism. Rutter took particular issue with the language Arnett employed in his book concerning the relationship between the Kitchin family and their African American neighbors, and later, constituents. She noted "perhaps the most jaw-dropping passage (and there are many)" in the book "is one in which Arnett waxes nostalgic about the affection that people of African descent supposedly felt for Kitchin." She took particular

¹⁶ Alex Mathews Arnett, *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1937).

issue with Arnett's use of the term "love" in describing African American feelings towards Kitchin.¹⁷

Other scholars have noted that *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies* was Arnett's weakest work as a historian. Jerrold Hirsch claimed that Arnett wrote about the "good" Kitchin versus the "evil" Wilson, but noted his analysis was only superficial at best. "North Carolina, Claude Kitchin, and the Great War" does not argue that Arnett's book has no merit to a current study. Indeed, almost every book, article, chapter, dissertation, and thesis that was investigated in the process of creating this dissertation cited Arnett's book. Among countless examples of this process, Karl E. Campbell, author of "The First and Second World War Generations of North Carolina Political Leadership," an article in an edited book, mentioned in a footnote to consult two sources for more information about Kitchin. One was, of course, Alex Arnett's century-old book, and the other was a book by William Link. Link cited Arnett in his own references.¹⁸

One cannot escape Arnett's book, as it is the only full-length published biography on Kitchin. This dissertation drew on the research done by Arnett. But care must be taken when analyzing a work that is nearly a century old that was written by a person so close to the subject. There are many stories and anecdotes in his book that have no reference or

¹⁷ Emily Ruth Rutter, "Troubled Inheritance: Confronting Old Hierarchies in the New South," *Southern Cultures* 25, no. 3, (2019): 156-162.

¹⁸ Jerrold M. Hirsch, "Arnett, Alex Mathews," in William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: Volume 1 A-K*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 46-47; Karl E. Campbell, "The First and Second World War Generations of North Carolina Political Leadership" in *North Carolina's Experience during the First World War*, eds. Shepherd W. McKinley and Steven Sabol (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018), 169-187; William Link, *North Carolina: Change and Tradition in a Southern State* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 2009), 393. In Karl Campbell's article, see notes 10 and 11 on page 185.

citation, some of which are included in the chapters that follow this introduction, but careful notations of such occurrences are made evident. Many other anecdotes in Arnett's book were reported directly to Arnett through family interviews. There is no major reason to believe that Arnett fabricated anything. It is, of course, probable that he wanted to paint Kitchin in a positive light, so he might have embellished certain stories, or perhaps his interviewees embellished their own account of those stories. At least once Arnett got information plain wrong. Arnett wrote that Kitchin claimed four-fifths of Democratic members of Congress agreed with him on an issue concerning the war-preparedness campaign. Actually, Kitchin said the opposite.¹⁹

Arnett was close to the Kitchin family and helped to organize Claude Kitchin's papers to go to the archives in Chapel Hill. In the next few paragraphs, I will note the other attempts at biography on Kitchin, but all of them fall short of being called a true biography. Obviously, Arnett's *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies* comes the closest. The preface and first chapter describe much of Claude's earlier life before he entered Congress. Even the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* cites Arnett for information on the rest of the Kitchin family in many cases. But as mentioned above, Arnett may have been too close to Kitchin to paint a true portrait of his subject. For instance, there is no mention of the Red Shirt Campaign in his book. The Red Shirts were basically a terrorist organization that operated in North Carolina and other states to intimidate and commit violence in order to prevent black people from voting. We will never know exactly why Arnett chose not to mention the role the group played as the

¹⁹ Arnett, *Claude Kitchin*, 58-76; *New York Times*, November 9, 1915.

reason that Kitchin was first elected to the House of Representatives from North Carolina's second district, but Arnett's omission does help illustrate why a new investigation is necessary.

Indeed, a smaller but no less important purpose in this dissertation is to reevaluate Claude Kitchin's role in American memory. If he is remembered at all, it is due to his connection to the war-preparedness movement, vote on the war resolution, and eventual engagement in the Great War. At least, that is what the roadside marker outside of his former residence states. The Kitchin political dynasty emerged during a time when white southerners were ready and willing to do whatever was necessary to regain power from recently liberated African Americans. But it is worth noting that the Kitchins cannot be separated from their rise to political power as part of the racist southern movement which took power, and the vote, away from southern blacks. We should remember Kitchin as the loudest and most influential opponent of entry to the war, but we should also remember how he attained that position. Intimidation and violence tactics won his own, his father's, and his brother's, seats in government.

In the master's theses that preceded my own study, three attempted to explain Kitchin's opposition to war as a pacifist. The "Pacifism of Claude Kitchin, 1915-1917" is a master's thesis written by Ferdinand Melevage in 1949 and the first attempt post-Arnett to bring Kitchin back to the historical discourse. Melevage explained that the purpose of his thesis was to trace the evolution of Kitchin's pacifism in the pre-war years, and he set the climax of his narrative at the anti-war speech delivered to the House on April 5, 1917. While it is an adequate attempt to explain Kitchin's reasons for pacifism, this thesis is

woefully short and filled with lengthy block quotations and little real analysis. Melevage concluded that Kitchin was a pacifist but never fully defined his reasoning for that conclusion. “Claude Kitchin, Second District Congressman from North Carolina, 1901-1923,” a master’s thesis by Florence Dunn Bunting in 1996, explored Kitchin’s upbringing and early life to explain his later objections to the violence of the Great War. She spent considerable space in an exploration of the living conditions in northeastern North Carolina, the area where Kitchin was born, from the weeks just before the Civil War broke out through the years of Kitchin’s youth during Reconstruction. Bunting concluded that Kitchin’s opposition to war began in his youth, which was mostly explained to Claude by his father, a Captain in the Confederate army. In “Claude Kitchin and the War Preparedness Controversy, 1915-1917,” a master’s thesis by Elizabeth L. Steele from 1985, she examined Kitchin’s background as an agrarian progressive and how that shaped his responses to American intervention in Europe.²⁰

Three more theses attempted to explain Kitchin’s role as a Progressive reformer. “Pilgrimage to Reform: A Life of Claude Kitchin,” a dissertation by H. Larry Ingle in 1967, is the closest to a true successor piece to Arnett. Ingle explained Kitchin’s role as a product of the liberal agrarian movement and how in his early time in Congress Kitchin implemented and supported legislation to help farmers. Ingle obviously spent plenty of time researching and writing this work, but there is still some missing information and he

²⁰ Ferdinand Melevage, “Pacifism of Claude Kitchin, 1915-1917” (master’s thesis, De Paul University, 1949); Florence Dunn Bunting, “Claude Kitchin, Second District Congressman from North Carolina, 1901-1923: A Study of the Forces that Shaped His Attitudes and Led to His Opposition to World War I” (master’s thesis, East Carolina University, 1996); Elizabeth Steele, “Claude Kitchin and the War Preparedness Controversy, 1915-1917 (master’s thesis, Miami University, 1985).

was not critical enough of Arnett's findings. "Rural Radical Rampant: The Early Congressional Career of Claude Kitchin," a master's thesis by Anthony R. Strickland in 1976, detailed Kitchin's early years in Congress, especially highlighting his role as a member of the agrarian left. This thesis followed Kitchin to April 1917 and the declaration-of-war vote, but Strickland spent most of his final chapter explaining Kitchin's role as a tax reformer. "Claude Kitchin and the Financing of World War I," a master's thesis by Scott Corl in 1998, investigated Kitchin as a tax reformer, which was one of Kitchin's long-term goals as a Congressman. Corl concluded that Kitchin used his seniority and position, and World War I, as an opportunity to restructure the American tax system. Corl suggested that despite Kitchin's opposition to American involvement in the war, it provided the vehicle through which he could achieve progressive tax reform goals.²¹

While each of these semi-biographical theses of Claude Kitchin are important contributions, they all fall short of producing adequate answers to Kitchin's role in the anti-preparedness movement in the United States. Arnett's book comes the closest to achieving this dissertation's goal, but like several others mentioned above, is more concerned with describing Kitchin's role in financing the war. Most of these theses also fall into the trap of relying far too heavily on trusting those that came before them. There are many anecdotes, stories, and data that cite previous attempts, which ultimately go

²¹ H. Larry Ingle, "Pilgrimage to Reform, a Life of Claude Kitchin" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1967); Anthony Reid Strickland, "Rural Radical Rampant: The Early Congressional Career of Claude Kitchin, 1900-1917" (master's thesis, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1976), abstract; Scott Corl, "Claude Kitchin and the Financing of World War I" (master's thesis, East Carolina University, 1998). Strickland's thesis is littered with spelling errors, which are hard to ignore.

back to Alex Arnett. Many of those anecdotes are hearsay, with little or no grounding in the Kitchin Papers at Chapel Hill, or elsewhere.

Who progressives, like Kitchin, were and what they wanted has been the subject of much historiographical debate. The early interpretations from scholars such as Charles Beard saw a very black-and-white battle between the forces of democracy and the forces of privilege. Later, Richard Hofstadter and the consensus school argued that progressivism was a union between populist farmers and businessmen who were left behind by industrialism. Gabriel Kolko and James Weinstein of the New Left school believed that progressivism was actually a conservative movement. Robert Wiebe and Samuel Hays of the organization school expanded the discussion to include an international element to the progressives. C. Vann Woodward, Dewey Grantham, and Jack Kirby wrote about the specifically southern elements of progressivism. Southern progressives agreed with the larger goals of the movement, which aimed for better government, improved economic opportunities, and moral reform. The issue of race set southern progressivism apart from the national movement. It is also important to note that most progressives in North Carolina did not fight female suffrage, labor improvements, or for African American civil rights.²²

The third chapter of “North Carolina, Claude Kitchin, and the Great War” covers the great debates concerning the war-preparedness measures undertaken by the federal government and Kitchin’s arguments against the campaign. North Carolinians, and the American public at large, were obviously split over the war. Some pundits advocated for

²² David M. Kennedy, “Overview: The Progressive Era,” *Historian* 37 (May 1, 1978): 453-468.

more assistance to the Allies against Germany, while others preferred to keep the United States in isolation. Much of public opinion was against intervention into what was still (through early 1917) largely considered a European war. President Wilson eventually came down on the side of favoring war preparation and Kitchin challenged him head on.

Many preparedness advocates asserted that the United States was too vulnerable to foreign aggression, and even if America would not enter the war, a military buildup was necessary for security. Other allies of the movement wanted a seat at the peace table when the war ended but assumed that the United States would only be welcomed from a position of strength. One of Wilson's closest advisors, Colonel Edward House, travelled to Europe early in the war to attempt a negotiated settlement to bring it to an end.

However, he quickly realized that Europe was not ready to listen to American counsel, largely due to its perceived weaknesses. The military preparedness movement, and its naval counterpart, emerged out of the Progressive Era as one more way for the government to protect the country. Kitchin consistently maintained that any military expenditures beyond its current budget would only benefit men of industry and banking, mainly in the northeast, who he called the "jingoists and war traffickers." American intervention in Mexico proved to him, and many others, that with some minor improvements, the army and navy were already well prepared for any potential war.

Claude Kitchin's role in the preparedness debates has unfortunately been understudied. He elicited only brief mentions in other scholarly works on the preparedness movement. The obvious sources to look at concerning this topic come from Arthur Link, the pre-eminent Wilson biographer. Each volume of Link's multivolume,

albeit unfinished, study offers at least some insight to the preparedness debates. Another of the standard texts on American preparedness is John P. Finnegan's *Against the Specter of a Dragon*. Finnegan and Link explained the preparedness movement from a national level. Like so many of the other works concerning the First World War, the procedures and campaigns from a federal standpoint have been covered by these scholars.²³

Another one of the major themes that historians have dealt with involving the United States's debates about entry to the Great War is the changing nature of American society as a whole. For example, one of the major arguments from scholars concerns the expansion of the American surveillance state. Jennifer Keene's *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* offers insight into the changing nature of the United States as a whole due to WWI. This dissertation does not draw any conclusion about the changing social nature of the country, but her book helped with the understanding of these overall social changes. Looking at the macro-level of American history, Keene argued that the World War was one of the pivotal events in changing the nature of the federal government in the United States. Others have also written about the theme of the expanding surveillance state. For example, Jeanette Keith explained how the state expanded power in the South in her *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight*. Theodore Kornweibel also wrote about the expansion of the federal surveillance system concerning African Americans in *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns against Black Militancy, 1919-*

²³ Arthur S. Link, *The Struggle for Neutrality, 1914-1915* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Confusions and Crises, 1915-1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); John Patrick Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914-1917* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974).

1925. Keene, Keith, Kornweibel, and other scholars have noted this change, and it is evident throughout this dissertation.²⁴

The fourth chapter moves to the naval buildup associated with the preparedness movement. Kitchin fought much harder against naval expenditures than with the regular army. He often argued that the American navy was the best in the world, behind Great Britain's. Another prominent North Carolinian happened to be in a position to influence federal naval policy. Josephus Daniels of North Carolina rose to the position of Secretary of the Navy in Wilson's administration. Daniels and Kitchin had an amiable relationship and tended to agree, at least at first, that the war should have stayed as a European matter. Kitchin and Daniels were well enough acquainted that they trusted each other to babysit the others' children.²⁵

The arguments about America's lack of preparedness for a war were actually tested in this period too. A unique event provided a glimpse of American preparedness in Mexico, which was in the midst of a civil war by 1916. The United States found a chance to test itself in an international crisis. Intervention in Mexico proved that the American army and navy were ready to defend America's borders, but also revealed that there was plenty of work still needed to make the military into a modern fighting force.²⁶

²⁴ Keene, *Doughboys*; Keith, *Rich Man's War*; Theodore Kornweibel, *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

²⁵ Lee A. Craig, *Josephus Daniels: His Life and Times* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Joseph L. Morrison, *Josephus Daniels: The Small-d Democrat* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 81, 169.

²⁶ John S. D. Eisenhower, *Intervention!: The United States and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1917* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1993); Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon*.

The fifth chapter explains why the war started in Europe, what North Carolinians were told about it, and how Kitchin and the state funded the American war effort. There is an exhaustive amount of literature available on the causes of the Great War. From a European perspective, the best source is Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War*. Clark himself admitted that there were already innumerable books and sources to scour for this information, but he satisfactorily whittled the causes down. For an American approach, Alan Axelrod's *How America Won World War I* adequately explained the reasons for American entry. North Carolina was on the verge of an agricultural revolution in terms of new machinery and potential increased crop yields when the war broke out, so this chapter also clarifies the state's role as a potential "corn basket" for the world, with additional information on food and fuel conservation efforts around the state. No discussion of a southern state is complete without an investigation of racial roles. Nina Mjagkij's *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience During World War I* proved invaluable as a source to understand the African American dimension of North Carolina at this time.²⁷

In the sixth chapter, this dissertation explores the state of North Carolina's military buildup after the war declaration. There was a great deal of support for the war effort but also much resistance to involvement. This chapter explains how North Carolina mobilized for entry and how it did not. From the declaration of war, it took nearly a full

²⁷ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper, 2013); Alan Axelrod, *How America Won World War I: The U.S. Military Victory in the Great War – The Causes, the Course, and the Consequences* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2018); Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience During World War I* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011).

year before American servicemen saw action against the enemy. The process of getting young men ready to fight was mirrored around the country. By population, North Carolina was the fourteenth largest state in the country and third largest state in the South at the time. Part of the discussion of the mobilization effort will include an examination of those who did not mobilize. Resisters, deserters, and draft evaders, or “slackers,” play a key role in this chapter. “Slacker” was a term generally applied to those who refused to play a role in the war effort. There were two high profile cases of armed resistance to the draft in North Carolina.

The most thorough book that investigates southern resistance is Jeanette Keith’s *Rich Man’s War, Poor Man’s Fight*, in which she explained class differences and reactions among southerners to the draft and the debate among southerners about whether to go to war. This treatment is the most in-depth study of southerners during the war to date. However, her main interest was on the rural South, which was largely outside of the influence of the federal government, and she did not spend much ink on North Carolina at all. Gerald Shenk’s *“Work or Fight!”* investigates another kind of resistance. He uses case studies from four states to tell the stories of white men who were able to avoid military service in favor of some kind of “essential” civilian service. White men who were exempted were often married and owned property, which Shenk interprets as meaning that the existing social order stayed in place. Slackers from around North

Carolina had many different reasons for their resistance, and a case study of the Tar Heel state helps build on this work.²⁸

One cannot efficiently understand what men had to lose by evading the draft or deserting without understanding the driving force behind its popular implementation, so this chapter creates a dialogue with works about what “voluntarism” meant in the United States in the early twentieth century. Christopher Capozzola questioned whether wartime voluntarism was actually voluntary at all. He introduced the term “coercive voluntarism” to describe the occurrence of local groups policing their communities to ensure voluntary compliance with wartime edicts. He argued that without the willing participation of local community leaders, the federal government could never have successfully created the culture of obligation that led to the successful mobilization of the United States in the 1910s. According to David Kennedy, not everything came down to “coercive voluntarism” for Americans. He suggested that the United States developed, and even had to rely on, conscription because not enough volunteers could be coerced.²⁹

To understand the real nature of voluntarism in the United States, this chapter also looks at American propaganda efforts that led the country in a very short amount of time to go from chanting, “he kept us out of war,” to a majority of Americans becoming enthusiastic about participation. This idea gets to the heart of North Carolina’s opinion during the time period: many did not want to participate. However, due to ideas of

²⁸ Keith, *Rich Man’s War*; Gerald Shenk, “*Work or Fight!*”: *Race, Gender, and the Draft in World War One* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Shenk’s case study states are Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, and California.

²⁹ Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You*; Keene, “American Historiography on World War I,” 464; Kennedy, *Over Here*.

coercive volunteerism, many were forced to participate. Much of the voluntarism was promoted by federal and state propaganda. Alan Axelrod's *Selling the Great War* explains how the federal government undertook influential propaganda efforts to sell America on the war. Robert Ferrell's study of Woodrow Wilson also explains the efforts on the federal level of getting Americans on board with the war effort.³⁰

Many of the books that deal with the idea of coercive volunteerism that emerged out of the preparedness campaigns detail similar themes. The preparedness campaigns were generally supported by northern elites, professionals, large newspapers, and mostly Republicans. On the other hand, farmers, ordinary people, and mostly southern Democrats who dominated Congress, obviously with Claude Kitchin at the top, opposed the movement. Volunteers do not desert as often as draftees, and drafted men became coerced volunteers due in large part to the American preparedness movement; however, many simply evaded by never showing up, and many southern legislators opposed American militarism and involvement. This chapter explains who the draftees and coerced volunteers from North Carolina that ended up deserting training camp, or avoided service all together, were; what compelled them to make it as far as they did in

³⁰ Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Robert Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917-1921* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985). The literature / biographies of Wilson during the war are fairly extensive and most include information on the change from neutrality to war preparedness and how Wilson tried to get Americans ready for war. These include Jim Powell, *Wilson's War: How Woodrow Wilson Led to Hitler, Stalin, and World War II* (New York: Crown Forum, 2005), chapter 3; Richard Striner, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I: A Burden Too Great to Bear* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) chapters 3 and 4; and, of course, the best authority on Wilson, Arthur Link, *Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World, 1913-1921* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), introduction and chapter 4.

the selective service process before leaving, if applicable; and what local and state politicians did in defense or injury of these Tar Heels.³¹

One of the best lenses to view North Carolina's commitment to fighting abroad is through the Selective Service system. The debate in the United States about the proper military recruitment tool (draft or volunteer) has been going on since its founding. The most comprehensive book on the draft throughout the U.S. history is John W. Chambers's *To Raise an Army*. One of the major themes that Chambers returned to over and over again in this book was that of an American contradiction. Americans have collectively always loved and valued military service going back to the Revolution, while at the same time, they have resisted national compulsion to serve in the military because of the value of individual liberty. Today, as in 1917 and 1918, deserters and slackers might be called "cowards" or "unpatriotic" for avoiding service. Perhaps a level of sympathy for draft evaders of the past can be achieved because, as sociologist Charles Moskos puts it, "In a manner of speaking, the vast majority of American youth are now [since 1973] draft dodgers."³²

By the time that war came to America in April 1917, the estimated strength of the regular American army and the National Guard was at about two hundred thousand men

³¹ Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon*; Paul Koistinen, *Mobilizing for Modern War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865-1919* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997); W.J. Breen, *Uncle Sam at Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism, and the Council of National Defense, 1917-1919* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984).

³² John Whiteclay Chambers, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 205-238. Peterson, *Avoidance and Evasion of Military Service*, iv; Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2000); John Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1983).

combined. Despite the lengthy preparedness campaigns across the state and throughout the country, facing a war in which many millions had already died fighting, millions more were currently engaged in action, and an entire generation of Europeans was involved, the United States was not ready in terms of manpower. An estimate of over seven hundred thousand men were deemed necessary to contribute in the war. Most Americans had hoped to reach that number through volunteers. However, the reality was different.

CHAPTER II

THE KITCHIN DYNASTY: BACKGROUND, BIOGRAPHY, AND POLITICS IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1869-1914

Half the civilized world is now a slaughterhouse for human beings. This Nation is the last hope of peace on earth, good will toward men. I am unwilling for my country by statutory command to pull up the last anchor of peace in the world and extinguish during the long night of a world-wide war the only remaining star of hope for Christendom. I am unwilling by my vote to-day for this Nation to throw away the only remaining compass to which the world can look for guidance in the paths of right and truth, of justice and humanity, and to leave only force and blood to chart hereafter the path of mankind to tread.

--Claude Kitchin, Speech in Opposition to the War Resolution, April 6, 1917

On April 6, 1917, House Majority Leader Claude Kitchin took to the floor of the House shortly after midnight wearing a William Jennings Bryan-inspired string tie, a mode of fashion that his hero, Bryan, would have been proud of. Kitchin was about to announce to the crowded room that he was going to vote against the war resolution that would send the American Republic into the “bloodiest war known in the history of the world.” He continued, “Half of the civilized world is now a slaughterhouse for human beings. [The United States] is the last hope of peace on earth.” The great orator passionately pleaded with the chamber for his allotted ten minutes in vain.¹

Only days before, on April 2, President Woodrow Wilson asked a special joint session of Congress for a declaration of war against Imperial Germany. The campaigns of

¹ *New York Times*, April 6, 1917; Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 254; *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 332-333.

unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany that renewed in early 1917 proved to be too much for Wilson to stomach, and he saw no other option than to ask for this declaration. Kitchin knew that pleading with the Congress to find another solution and avoid war would set the entire American press against him and his potentially unpopular opinion. He knew that his stance might also signal the “death knell” to his political career. He explained to the filled chamber that after “sleepless nights and endless prayers” he knew what he needed to do.¹

The *Greensboro Daily News* noted on April 7 that Kitchin was the only representative from North Carolina to vote against American entry into the Great War. The dramatic midnight spectacle on the House floor was the culmination of Kitchin’s tireless work over the previous years to prevent the United States from entering a conflict to which he saw no real benefit for any American, or North Carolinian. Although historians such as Jennifer Keene, Christopher Capozzola, and David Kennedy have correctly noted the general enthusiasm for President Wilson’s preparedness program around the country, an examination of the speeches, press releases, and correspondence of Claude Kitchin suggests that it is important to refine their findings by investigating the opposing viewpoint in North Carolina.²

¹ “Claude Kitchin Only North Carolinian to Vote in the Negative,” *Greensboro Daily News*, April 7, 1917. The full vote was 373-50 in the House and 82-6 in the Senate. Of those who voted against the war, six in the Senate and fifty in the House, thirty-two were Republicans, mostly from the Midwestern states. The only Socialist Party member, Meyer London, and a Prohibition Party member from California joined them. London was the only Easterner to vote no. Three of the six senators who voted against the war were Democrats.

² “Claude Kitchin Only North Carolinian to Vote in the Negative,” *Greensboro Daily News*, April 7, 1917; Jennifer Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), Chapters 1-2; Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-7; David Kennedy,

The man who captivated the attention of the United States on that chilly, rainy April night has largely been forgotten today, despite his importance to a nation on the eve of its launch to world power status. Kitchin was well known in the 1910s in North Carolina and around the country due to his decades of service to the country. He was well respected in many circles and loathed in a few others. Like many figures of national renown from the American past, he has a checkered record, which must not be ignored, and a new thesis-driven biography of his actions leading up to America's entry to the World War must not be misconstrued as hero worship. He was a white southern man of his time who helped disfranchise black voters in North Carolina, but he believed that in doing so, he also had an obligation to protect those black Tar Heels out of a sense of paternalism, or *noblesse oblige*. That protection, of course, meant keeping African Americans in a second-class status.

Kitchin's early years in Congress are not particularly noteworthy. He seemed to be set up to just run his course in Congress as another uninteresting representative among many who would pass into history. He was reelected biannually with very easy victories. Kitchin's most significant offices came later in his tenure in office as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and as House Majority Leader for the Sixty-Fourth and Sixty-Fifth Congresses between 1915-1919. These two roles were usually held by the same person at the time. During his terms in Congress, Kitchin focused on the tariff, revenue bills, and eventually, the funding of the United States' efforts in the World War.

Over Here: The First World War and American Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), Chapters 1-3.

He opposed the military preparedness measures of President Woodrow Wilson and was one of fifty members of Congress to vote against the declaration of war on Germany in April 1917. Kitchin crossed swords with the president on several different occasions, although he considered Wilson to be the best president since the conclusion of the Civil War. However, after he failed to convince enough congressmen to vote against the resolution and war was ultimately declared, he recognized the realities of the vote and threw himself into the effort, arguing for an increase in taxes on excess corporate profits to fund the military, rather than through the sale of Liberty Bonds, which would place the financial burden of the war on future generations. He suffered a stroke in 1920 but continued to serve in Congress until his death in 1923.³

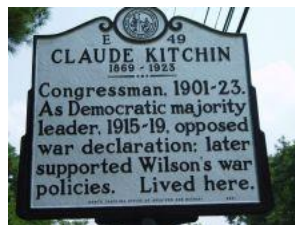


Figure 1. Claude Kitchin Road Marker. North Carolina Office of Archives and History.

There are no marble or stone monuments to the Kitchin family around the state today, and perhaps there should not be.⁴ The only tangible indication that Kitchin was

³ Richard L. Watson, Jr., "Kitchin, Claude," in William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: Volume 3 H-K*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 372-374; Kitchin to H. F. Lease, October 27, 1915, Box 4, Claude Kitchin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter referred to as Kitchin Papers.

⁴ In today's political and social climate surrounding the controversial removal of statues and monuments that feature prominent southern racists, any monuments to Claude Kitchin or his family would come under harsh scrutiny. The Kitchins were racists. Claude himself was involved with the Red Shirt intimidation

here is a roadside marker near his former home in Scotland Neck, Halifax County, North Carolina, on US 258 (Main Street). The marker (see Figure 1) reads: “Congressman, 1901-23. As Democratic majority leader, 1915-1919, opposed war declaration; later supported Wilson’s war policies. Lived here.” At least one of his descendants currently resides at this home. Without this sign, which motorists most likely ignore, modern Americans would have nothing palpable to go on for information about the man who played such a pivotal role in America’s emergence as an international world power.

Claude Kitchin was born into a well-respected Tar Heel family that, in time, became a small political dynasty in the state. A family tradition explained that there were three Kitchin brothers who immigrated from England to the United States soon after the American War for Independence, with one ending up in Edgecombe County, North Carolina, where he grew tobacco and cotton, with a few slaves. Claude’s grandfather, Boas Kitchin, made the family prosperous and pushed it to the high levels of North Carolina society by marrying into the family of one of the largest landowners in the county. Like many young southern men, Boas sought land and fortune. He went to Alabama to find his, where he and his wife had several of their children before returning to North Carolina in the late 1840s. One of the children born in Alabama was Claude’s father, William Hodge Kitchin, in 1837. It was not until their return that Boas prospered.

gang. It is not clear if Claude himself was directly involved with violence, but he definitely helped organize and support the gang. Many Kitchin descendants today recognize the circumstances under which the Kitchins rose to political power, and this author reckons very few of them would support statues or monuments built in their honor. In fact, days before the defense of this dissertation, it was brought to the attention of this author that many descendants want Claude’s and William Walton’s roadside markers to be rewritten to tell more complete stories. The North Carolina Office of Archives and History has responded by revising the online essays but no changes to the physical markers have been made as of yet.

Boas Kitchin reported owning \$1,000 worth of real estate on the official 1850 census. A decade later, his assets swelled to \$4,800 worth of land, in addition to \$12,000 of personal property. His father-in-law contributed at least fourteen slaves to Kitchin's growing wealth. In today's value, Boas owned real estate worth nearly \$150,000 and \$370,000 in personal property. The personal property was almost certainly made up of many African American slaves.⁵

William Hodge Kitchin had a generally pleasant upbringing. As the son of a well-to-do southern planter, he rarely wanted for anything. He left school at Emory and Henry, a Methodist college in Virginia, when North Carolina reluctantly seceded from the Union in 1861, to enlist as a private in Company 1 of the Twelfth North Carolina Volunteer Regiment, joining the "Granville Greys" unit, sometimes called the "Halifax Infantry." He served his first year uneventfully before his regiment was sent to harsh fighting in places such as Mechanicsville, Sharpsburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. He fought in many of the major battles of the war. He was eventually elected to captain, and his regiment fought with the Army of Northern Virginia until he was wounded and captured by the Union in 1864. He earned the nickname Captain, or "Cap'n," Buck during his service to the Confederacy, a moniker that followed him for the rest of his days, among friend and foe alike.⁶

⁵ *Third Census of the United States, 1810, North Carolina*: Edgecombe County, 752; *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, North Carolina*: Halifax County, 8; *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, North Carolina: Halifax County*, 9-10; H. Larry Ingle, "Pilgrimage to Reform, a Life of Claude Kitchin" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1967), 1-2. Calculations of today's value of the Kitchin's estates by author on officialdata.org. In the 1850 census, William was listed as "Wm" and was indicated to have been born in North Carolina. Perhaps that was a mistake as the 1860 census lists "William" as born in Alabama.

⁶ Louis H. Manarin, *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865: A Roster, Vol. V: Infantry* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Division of Archives and History, 1975), 167, 200, and 218; United States War Department, *The*

Cap'n Buck was a diehard, anti-Union southerner and only reluctantly was released from captivity after several refusals to profess his oath of loyalty to the Union, one of the requirements for release of Confederate officers. In fact, Cap'n Buck was a member of the famous "Immortal Six Hundred," Confederate officers who refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, and thus, he was one of the last of the Confederate prisoners to be released from captivity. Kitchin's experience in this unit probably helped to shape his anti-Union sentiment, although he did work with northern lending firms later in his life. He had to endure some unusually cruel conditions as a Union prisoner. Many of his fellow detainees never made it back to the Land of Dixie, dying due to poor treatment, malnutrition, and disease.⁷

Cap'n Buck returned home to Scotland Neck after the war to study politics and law. Although he never returned to college, he read law after his release. He was admitted to the North Carolina bar in 1869. Despite coming home to a war-ravaged state, he maintained the family's wealth initially by recovering an estate in California, although the details of this adventure are unclear. His main occupation postwar was in money lending, although he earned income from his significant landholdings. He issued

War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series IV, I (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 629; "Death of Capt. W. H. Kitchin," *Scotland Neck Commonwealth*, Feb. 7, 1901; Thurman D. Kitchin to Alex Arnett, November 25, 1935, Box 45, Kitchin Papers; Ingle, "Pilgrimage to Reform," 3. Differing sources list two different units in which William H. Kitchin supposedly served. The Twelfth North Carolina Volunteers seems to be the most likely, but he is also cited as serving in the Second North Carolina Volunteers. Different sources seem to use both "Cap'n" or "Cap'm" but only "Captain" in official reports. To distinguish William Hodge Kitchin from his son, William Walton Kitchin, I chose to use "Cap'n Buck" or just "Buck" to indicate the elder Kitchin.

⁷ *Record of Deeds*, Halifax County, Book 48, 81. For a full account of the Immortal Six Hundred, T.H. Pearce, "The Immortal Six Hundred," *The State: A Weekly Survey of North Carolina* 50, no. 2 (July 1982): 20-22 and T.H. Pearce, "The Immortal Six Hundred," *The State: A Weekly Survey of North Carolina* 50, no. 3 (August 1982): 15-23.

mortgage loans to many people in Halifax County, at modest interest rates, which helped supplement the money gained from his farms. Even African Americans turned to the Cap'n for small loans on occasion, which he sometimes agreed to provide.⁸

Later, he finally decided to enter politics and was elected to the United States House of Representatives from North Carolina, serving one term from 1879 to 1881. His incursion into politics was largely driven by racism. He was especially wary of Reconstruction-induced “Negro rule” across the South, and as soon as the federal troops were out of his home state for good, he began hatching plans to unseat the black representative in his district. He called white men who voted for anyone but a Democrat “race traitors.” However, the Cap'n considered himself above unscrupulous methods of election interference, such as miscounting votes or ballot stuffing, common tactics in the South. He preferred galvanizing a united white vote and intimidating black voters, which also were common tactics in the South.⁹

Despite his preference for more “honorable” methods of winning the Congressional seat, his election was tainted by accusations of irregularities, which the *New York Times* labeled “pure Democratic villainy.” He was also aided by a split Republican ticket, with two opponents claiming their party’s nomination. The two African American Republican contenders spent more time attacking each other in the campaign than they did attacking Cap'n Kitchin. And for the first time since the Civil

⁸ “Death of Capt. W. H. Kitchin,” *Scotland Neck Commonwealth*, February 7, 1901; Alex Arnett, *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1937), 18; Ingle, “Pilgrimage to Reform,” 6.

⁹ Josephus Daniels, *Editor in Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 341.

War began, a Democrat took the Second District in North Carolina. When he ran for reelection, he faced a single opponent. This time, a white, northern-born, Republican “carpetbagger” easily defeated him despite more charges of Democratic fraud.¹⁰

The district that Cap’n Buck, and later his son, Claude, represented was known as the “Black Second.” The racial connotations of this district are quite evident in the nickname. The *Wilmington Post* noted that “THE SECOND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT is a masterpiece. It takes in Craven then wanders clean to the Virginia line, and turns a sharp corner around Nash and grasps Warren.” The district was deliberately drawn to keep as many black voters out of the surrounding districts as possible in an expert example of gerrymandering. Originally, the Democrats in the state knew they could not hold the Second, but by sacrificing this one district, they would neutralize thousands of Republican, black votes. Eight out of the ten counties in the district had sizeable black majorities, and even the white majority counties were almost 50 percent black. It took a split-Republican ticket, and later, the disfranchising of nearly all black votes in 1900, to elect a Democrat here again.¹¹

After his term in Congress, Cap’n Buck remained a significant political figure in North Carolina until his death, despite holding no additional elected office. He made political speeches around the state regularly, and he kept his opinions in the public view as the editor of *Scotland Neck Democrat*. The Cap’n was almost always a well-liked

¹⁰ Eric Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872-1901: The Black Second* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 70-73; *New York Times*, December 26, 1878.

¹¹ “The Colored Nomination in the Second Judicial District,” *Wilmington Post*, July 7, 1878; Anderson, *Race and Politics*, 3-4.

figure in his hometown, becoming one of the most prominent citizens well before he served in Congress. He helped to build the town railroad, schools, churches, and factories. He later joined the Farmers' Alliance, which began in North Carolina in Robeson County in 1887. As the Alliance spread around the state, Buck became a leader in the organization.¹²

The elder Kitchin also had some detestable qualities. His quick and harsh temper might be excused, as he was described as a man who was always in a hurry, but inexcusably, he was very much a racist, commenting in 1888, "When you talk negro equality, negro supremacy, negro domination to our people, every man's blood rises to boiling heat at once." Even more bluntly, he told a group of Virginia Democrats, "The Almighty had made [the negro] not a little lower than the angels, but a little lower than the white man." Of course, most southern whites spoke with similar language. Such attitudes did not begin with Cap'n Buck and did not die with him, but they helped shape his children's attitudes later.¹³

Democratic President Grover Cleveland even lost Buck Kitchin's support partly because of Cleveland's stance on racial issues. At one point, Kitchin declared that "I would prefer the Devil himself for President to Cleveland." In 1894, Cap'n Kitchin joined the Populist Party after years of loyalty to the Democrats, and during the election that year, he produced more speeches for the Populists than even the leading Populist in North Carolina, Marion Butler. However, Kitchin left the Democrats only for a brief

¹² Arnett, *Kitchin*, 11-12.

¹³ "The Leading Issues in the Coming Campaign," *Raleigh State Chronicle*, May 4, 1888; "Hon. W. H. Kitchin in Richmond," *Scotland Neck Democrat*, November 07, 1889.

period, largely because of his distrust of Cleveland, as the president was a northerner, and he rejoined the Democratic Party in 1897, largely due to his fears on racial issues. He believed that the only thing that could prevent “Negro rule” was a Democrat. He died in 1901 before he could see the full fruit that two of his eight sons would bear as they succeeded him in politics. He was reported to have said in his last days that he was “proud of his sons.”¹⁴

Cap’n Buck had a brood of children with his wife, Maria Figures Kitchin, née Arrington. There are two contradictory versions of Cap’n Buck and Maria’s first meeting. The first comes from Alex Arnett and is most likely dramatized and inaccurate. He claimed that Kitchin met Maria during the Civil War under unhappy circumstances. His company’s flag bearer was a man, or teenager more accurately, who became a close friend to him during the war, John W. Arrington. John showed Cap’n Buck a small picture of his sister, Maria, during one of the long periods of boredom associated with being a soldier. Kitchin was so impressed with her beauty that he began writing her letters and planned to accompany John to his home on an upcoming furlough. Tragically, in May of 1864, at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, John was shot. While he was dying on the battlefield in Buck’s arms, he asked Kitchin to return his personal belongings to his home, which Kitchin did on the scheduled furlough that was meant to introduce him to John’s attractive sister. Kitchin did what John asked but he also took the

¹⁴ William Kitchin to Zebulon B. Vance, December, 1887, Zebulon Baird Vance Papers, 1824-1915, Folder 67, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Eric Anderson, “Kitchin, William Hodge,” in William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: Volume 3 H-K*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 375-376; “Death of Capt. W. H. Kitchin,” *Scotland Neck Commonwealth*, February 7, 1901.

opportunity to woo Maria, who was impressed enough to marry him the next time they met. That is the way that Alex Arnett relayed their first encounter. The other, and accurate, version of their first meeting explained that Kitchin and Maria were introduced by her brother, John, but that they were married on January 5, 1864, five months before John Arrington died. In either case, Cap'n Buck and Maria undoubtedly met due to Kitchin's military service with Arrington.¹⁵

Both sides of Claude's family had deep roots in the United States. Maria Arrington came from old money, and the family was a bit higher on the southern social hierarchy than the Kitchin family had been. She could trace her ancestry in Virginia to about 1700 and in North Carolina to about 1769, and the family could trace its heritage back possibly as far as thirteenth-century England. The family name was also a surname of local landowners in England. Maria Arrington's brothers all fought for North Carolina in the Civil War. The Arrington family probably also fought in the American War for Independence. Maria lived in Halifax County at the time of her marriage to Kitchin. The Cap'n and Maria had eleven children in total, including Claude, many of whom had large broods of their own.¹⁶

¹⁵ Thurmond Kitchin to Alex Arnett, November 25, 1935, Box 45, Kitchin Papers; Ingle, "Pilgrimage," 3-4; North Carolina, County Marriages, 1762-1979, page 113. Kitchin's marriage certificate and the dates of the Battle of Spotsylvania indicate that either Thurmond Kitchin or Alex Arnett were waxing nostalgic for the Kitchin family to give the patriarch a more heroic meeting with his wife, but the couple was clearly married before John Arrington died. Maria Figures Arrington's name has been the subject of dispute. She has been reported as "Maria Figgus" on occasion. A Kitchin descendent explained in a telephone interview to the author that "Figgus" emerged as a mispronunciation. A southern drawl will make "Figures" sound like "Figgus" to outsiders, thus the confusion in secondary sources.

¹⁶ John Bennett Boddie, *Southside Virginia Families: Volume II* (California: Clearfield Company Inc., 1956), 1-11; List from Arnett, *Wilson War Policies*, 9. Cap'n Kitchin's sons and daughters, in order of their ages were: Samuel Boaz, planter; William Walton, lawyer, Congressman, governor; Claude, lawyer, Congressman; John Arrington, planter; Paul, lawyer, state senator; Gertrude (Mrs. A. McDowell); Richard Vann, various; Annie Maria (Mrs. Charles L. McDowell); Thurman Delna, physician, President of Wake

Some of Cap'n Buck Kitchin's decisions in politics and life ended up being poor ones but he was always willing to take the unpopular or difficult course when he believed it was the right thing to do. Claude, and most of the Kitchin children, must have inherited this quality. One of Claude's trademarks as an adult was to follow his conscience, despite the popularity of his opinions, inevitably culminating in April of 1917 with an unpopular speech against entering the Great War. Of the Kitchin children, three entered politics, including Claude, William Walton, and Alvin Paul. Alvin served in the North Carolina State House and State Senate but with no real notable acts or speeches.

Claude's older brother, William Walton Kitchin, was the other politically significant Kitchin. William was the second son of Cap'n Buck and his namesake. He graduated from Wake Forest College in 1884 at eighteen and taught briefly before moving on to become the editor of the *Scotland Neck Democrat*, as his father had done. He later studied law at the University of North Carolina and passed the bar in 1887. He began his law practice in Roxboro, North Carolina, where he also began his political career as chairman of the Democratic executive committee of Person County. He served as United States Representative from North Carolina's Fifth District from 1896 to 1908, holding that office at one point during the same time Claude was a member of the House. The brothers collaborated on certain acts, but neither was in a position of any dramatic importance after Claude's election and before William left the House to take up residence in the North Carolina governor's mansion. One of William's best-known speeches from

Forest College; Leland H., planter; Teddy Alston, various. Several Kitchins ended up entering politics at the state level, but only Claude and his older brother, William Walton, made an appearance on the national stage.

his time in Congress was one in defense of the woman's suffrage amendment, but for the most part, his other years in Congress were lackluster.¹⁷

William's tenure as governor was a little more exciting. After sixty-one rounds of balloting, he received his party's nomination and was elected governor of North Carolina, taking office in 1909. He oversaw increases in education expenditures by the state as well as increases to public health services for the so-called feeble-minded. Railroads expanded, the state's banking institutions were improved, and the conservation of swampland increased. Little of what William accomplished, however, was revolutionary or particularly notable, as the two governors preceding him and the fifteen governors succeeding him had many of the same goals and policies. All of them were Democrats. After a failed campaign to be elected to the U.S. Senate, William returned to his law practice until a stroke forced him to retire in 1919.¹⁸

Claude was born on March 24, 1869, in Halifax County, North Carolina, near Scotland Neck. He spent his formative years in an economically depressed South that struggled to adjust to the changes that came to the United States after the Civil War. The whole country sustained heavy losses, but the South found recovery particularly difficult to achieve. Of course, all of the capital that southerners invested in owning other humans was wiped away with emancipation. Slave-based agriculture was the economic basis of the region, one that developed over centuries, and with that system now abolished, enormous adjustments were needed. Southern citizens took on massive debt from the

¹⁷ C. Sylvester Green, "Kitchin, William Walton," in William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: Volume 3 H-K*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 376-377.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 377.

government of the Confederate States of America, which would never be repaid, in addition to the massive material losses during the Union campaigns through the South. That destruction and unpaid debt turned into widespread poverty after the war.

One planter who had owned over a thousand slaves and eight plantations just outside of Scotland Neck, Thomas Devereux, experienced this economic transformation firsthand. The war cost him all of his slaves, several of his plantations, all of his useful livestock, and thousands of dollars of debt certificates from the Confederate government. Wage labor suffered simultaneously. Domestic help fetched five dollars a month in 1867 but dropped to about four dollars a month by 1872. Farm hands were paid similarly, especially after the Panic of 1873. Those losses and low wages were typical of the war-torn North Carolina that Claude grew up in.¹⁹

But the war took a less serious toll on the Kitchin family than many others in the state, as the patriarch, Cap'n Buck, survived and emerged in a sound financial situation, partly due to his California land speculation dealings. Claude was able to attend Vine Hill Academy as a youngster, as nearly all of his siblings did. Vine Hill was mainly a preparatory school for upper-class boys and girls, with a tuition of forty dollars and additional fees per subject. The school was not for run-of-the-mill children. Vine Hill took out advertisements in North Carolina newspapers: "A thorough course will be pursued. . . Boys will be prepared for College, or business." Claude proved himself to be

¹⁹ Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, "*Journal of a Sesech Lady*": *The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston 1860-1866*, ed. Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1979), xxi-xxiv; Florence Dunn Bunting, "Claude Kitchin, Second District Congressman from North Carolina 1901-1923: A Study of the Forces that Shaped his Attitudes and Led to His Opposition to World War I," (master's thesis, East Carolina University, 1996), 13.

a great student at the academy, where he also began to learn how to be a great public speaker. The school placed much emphasis on rhetoric, and he won medals for oratory against boys older than he was.²⁰

Claude entered Wake Forest College in 1883, where he studied law. He followed his older brother there, who was a senior by the time of his arrival. It was quite a small institution when Claude arrived, with a total population just in excess of 160 students. Cap'n Kitchin attended Claude's graduation with delight in 1888, at which Claude delivered a well-received salutatory address. In total, seven of the Kitchin children studied at Wake Forest. One brother, Thurman Delna Kitchin, later became president of the college. Like his father and siblings, Claude was a Baptist by birth, so it was a natural fit for the Kitchin children to attend Wake Forest.²¹

It was during his time in college that Kitchin met and courted Kate Mills, whose father was a well-respected senior faculty member at Wake Forest. The young woman was highly sought after by many of his classmates. She was by all accounts attractive, pleasant, and from a family of means. Much like Kitchin's mother was from a more prominent family than his father, so too was Kate higher in social standing than Claude.

²⁰ "Advertisement," *The Scotland Neck Democrat*, Oct. 3, 1867; Vine Hill Academy Papers, 1812-1893, Folder 1, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; "Advertisement," *Scotland Neck Commonwealth*, February 13, 1917; "Advertisement," *The Tarboro Southerner*, January 31, 1867, and July 9, 1868; "Advertisement," *Scotland Neck Democrat*, January 28, 1887. Tuition only fluctuated a little through the time Claude would have attended.

²¹ George W. Paschal, *History of Wake Forest College Volume II 1865-1905* (Wake Forest, NC: Wake Forest College Press, 1943), 209; "Personals," *Scotland Neck Democrat*, June 14, 1888 and June 21, 1888. There is conflicting information on the number of Cap'n Buck's children who attended Wake Forest. Alex Arnett lists eight who attended the college in *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies*, but the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* indicates that seven was the actual number.

Like many fathers, Professor Luther Mills was reluctant to allow his daughter to date, but in such a small setting, it seemed inevitable that she would be smitten by the handsome and eloquent young Claude. There is no doubt that many young men attending Wake Forest pitched their woo to Kate, as she was often seen out and about with her family in the town. Claude never had the opportunity to speak with Kate one-on-one until they shared their first date. Kate invited Claude to go on a school picnic together. They fished on the river that day and Claude became determined to marry her. At that point in his life, Claude was still unproven, and her father was reluctant to allow a marriage. The elder Cap'n Kitchin stepped in to negotiate with Professor Mills on Claude's behalf, assuring him that he would take care of the lovebirds until Claude was sound financially, since he was only nineteen at the time. The professor relented and the couple married on November 12, 1888. Claude and Kate had nine children through the course of their marriage.²²

In addition to finding the love of his life, Claude's time at the college prepared him for the coming career he would take. He graduated with several future state leaders and made life-long connections with the other young men of prominence at Wake Forest. His course training seemed standard, though maybe more thorough than one might expect from a college in postbellum North Carolina. Similar to the excellence Claude demonstrated in public speaking at Vine Hill, he became an accomplished orator at Wake

²² Arnett, *Kitchin*, 15-16; "Personals," *Scotland Neck Democrat*, November 15, 1888.

Forest. The classics, politics, and rhetoric became old hat to him. He became what he was expected to be, a minor southern aristocrat with a well-rounded education.²³

Kitchin spent his first years out of college honing his public speaking skills. The minimum age to pass the bar in North Carolina was twenty-one, and since he was nineteen at the time of graduation, he still had time to grow. He was the son of the most prominent man in Scotland Neck, after all. To polish his speaking skills in these years, he delivered several commencement addresses, including at Vine Hill Academy and participated in local civic activities in his hometown. The events he attended and the addresses he delivered helped him become better known as his own man in the community, which he may have believed would in turn help him gain clients as a young lawyer when the time came for that. He also read law for two years until he was admitted to the North Carolina bar at age twenty-one in 1890.²⁴

The young lawyer found that building a successful new practice was not easy. His first cases were small ones and generally uneventful. He often struggled to earn enough money for his own small but growing family, and occasionally, sought loans from his father. Alex Arnett reported that on one of these desperate trips to his father's house, Claude, by chance, was stopped by a black man in trouble and in need of a lawyer. Rather than beg for Cap'n Buck's money, he asked the man if he had five dollars to pay for his service, which the man had, and they were off to the magistrate's office. Kitchin cleared the man and gave the money to his wife. In time, more white and black clients came, and

²³ Vine Hill Academy Papers, Folder 1.

²⁴ Ingle, "Pilgrimage," 23-24.

Kitchin's reputation grew as a lawyer. This story may well be complete fiction. Arnett listed no names for this encounter, but court records indicate that the facts of the case are accurate and he did indeed represent an African American. Kitchin took cases where he could find them, even from African American clients.²⁵

Early in his life, Kitchin had shown little substantial interest in entering politics, but after his practice was becoming more successful, he was finally ready to enter what became his life's work. He decided that the past was the best indicator for the future and drew inspiration from his state's recent history to set up his personal political platform. Much as his older brother had, Claude entered politics slowly and locally. His reputation as a charismatic lawyer and compelling orator quickly spread and created a demand for his service as a speaker. In a commencement address delivered in June of 1890, Kitchin advised graduates to be wary of new theories and hold on to the old established truths of the world. His oratory was so impressive that by 1898 he was well known to local political officials, and they appointed him to the North Carolina Democratic Executive Committee for that year's state election to help organize the white supremacy campaign that returned much of the state legislature to Democratic control. The white supremacy campaign, called the "Red Shirt Movement," centered around intimidation and corruption at the polls; although not directly involved in its violence, Kitchin helped to mobilize the Red Shirt gang in his district, and he spoke in front of thousands who showed up to Red Shirt meetings in North Carolina.²⁶

²⁵ Arnett, *Kitchin*, 18-19.

²⁶ Commencement Address, June 13, 1890, Box 1, Kitchin Papers; Watson, "Kitchin, Claude," *Dictionary of North Carolina*, 372-374.

Members of this colorfully named movement traveled on red, horse-drawn buggies, with red draping on those horses. They also wore red shirts, hats, and trousers. Agreeing with their racist agenda, Kitchin publicly professed his interest in “eliminating the negro in politics and office holding.” He made speeches and wrote editorials often, leading up to the elections of 1898 and 1900 explaining the superiority of the white man over black people. He claimed that he hoped to accomplish these outcomes through peaceful methods, but he must have known that violence would happen in some capacity to prevent the “Negro vote.”²⁷

Kitchin and his father, among other prominent white men of Halifax County, were accused in 1898 of threatening to kill a “Negro registrar” in Roseneath township if the registrar did not resign his position. In the end, nothing ever came of the accusation. Registrar B. B. Steptoe charged that the men broke down his door and held him at pistol-point until he signed his resignation. Cap’n Buck was allegedly the ringleader of this incident. Warrants were issued for his and the others’ arrests, and Cap’n Buck vigorously denied the allegation. Word circulated that someone connected to the white supremacy movement had broken into Steptoe’s home and the Kitchin family’s well-known connection to the Red Shirt Movement made them top suspects. Cap’n Buck took a train to Raleigh to answer the charges, which nearly caused a riot outside of the courthouse. The judge who issued the warrants dismissed the charges “as soon as the evidence was

²⁷ “Rep. Kitchin Died Early Today After Lingering Illness,” *Concord Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1923; H. Leon Prather, “The Red Shirt Movement in North Carolina, 1898-1900,” *The Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 2 (April 1977): 174-184; “Mr. Claude Kitchin Writes Vigorously,” *Scotland Neck Commonwealth*, May 12, 1898.

completed.” This incident had no immediate connection to the Red Shirts. We may never know the full story of what happened in Mr. Steptoe’s home that evening.²⁸

However, the Red Shirts had a major impact on the outcome of the state elections of 1898 and 1900. These gangs of armed men, attired in red tunics, essentially acted as the intimidation wing of the Democratic Party. They carried guns and wore masks, although they were not necessarily members of the better-known Ku Klux Klan. The Red Shirts made death threats, indicated they would inflict economic harm on anti-Democratic forces, and resorted to direct violence, including beatings and even some murders. They succeeded in their goal of suppressing the African American vote in 1898. Many prominent North Carolinians, including Charles Aycock, Josephus Daniels, and the Kitchin family, were involved in the disfranchisement effort and justified the Red Shirt tactics as a “necessary evil” to prevent black political participation. Kitchin was well aware of the violent tactics. However, never publicly advocated for them.²⁹

In 1900, the Kitchin family strongly supported the gubernatorial campaign of Charles B. Aycock. Broadly, Aycock was interested in an educational renaissance in North Carolina, along with a general broadening of the social functions the government should provide. Besides racism, Aycock is best remembered today as the state’s education governor. He committed his campaign for governor to the disfranchisement of most black voters on the grounds of illiteracy, provided that the old southern principle of

²⁸ “Old Halifax County Redeemed,” *Roanoke News*, November 11, 1898; Josephus Daniels, *Editor in Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 304-307.

²⁹ Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 447; Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 162-172; Prather, “The Red Shirt Movement,” 174-184.

noblesse oblige, or paternalism, was carried out. If blacks were to be disfranchised, it would become obligatory of white leaders to make provisions for them, he reasoned. Their schools and other public institutions would have to be improved alongside white public spaces. Most members of the white elite were ready to assist African Americans who were willing to relent to white interests. Some state politicians balked at the suggestion but relented when Aycock threatened them politically. However, the true motives of *noblesse oblige* were racist, and black institutions rarely received the same resources as their white counterparts.³⁰

The Kitchin family was well aware of the extra-legal means needed to secure Aycock's 1900 victory. Claude obviously supported Aycock's goals, and the elder Kitchin may also have supported Aycock but was too ill at the time to actively participate in Aycock's campaign. However, Cap'n Kitchin was able to help with Claude's campaign in the same year, as he did not have to travel much to support his son. The elder Kitchin's sympathies concerning paternalism were already well noted in local newspapers. He remarked as far back as 1889, "Do all you can for [the Negro] without injuring yourselves. Take care of him; for he has not sense enough to take care of himself."³¹

The intimidation tactics and violence, employed with ruthless success by the Red Shirts in 1898 and 1900, helped send Claude to the United States House of

³⁰ Helen G. Edmunds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), chapter 13; William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 16-17.

³¹ Arnett, *Kitchin*, 22-23; Edmunds, *Fusion Politics*, 37-45; "Hon. W. H. Kitchin in Richmond," *Scotland Neck Democrat*, November 11, 1889.

Representatives in 1901 as representative of the “Black Second,” the same district that his father served, and the seat that he remained in literally for the rest of his life. His 1900 platform called for a return of white control to this district and all of eastern North Carolina and even the repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment. His father, brother, and others, all impressive orators, stumped for him around the Second District, echoing those demands for white domination.³²

Later generations might describe Claude Kitchin’s election as “shady” and certainly dishonest. Ballot boxes in his district had false bottoms, which Kitchin most likely knew about but had no direct part in setting up. Kitchin’s life-long reputation for honesty and integrity were not called into question, as these tactics were “justified” by the result of returning the Second District to white Democratic control. For his first election, Kitchin defeated a Republican, Joseph J. Martin, by the healthy margin of 10,380 votes. From then on, he became unbeatable in his seat and never needed to resort to this dishonest kind of campaign again. However, restrictions on African American voters in his district endured. Nevertheless, he became so popular with his white constituents that historians have noted he was “probably as undefeatable as any Congressman in the country,” and despite his outward modesty, he knew it. Secure politically, he could afford to be independent-minded and oppose otherwise popular decisions. Perhaps as an omen of things to come, Kitchin’s first vote in the House was on the losing side. Even so, his popularity and unbeatability were obvious, even from his first reelection. In 1904, Kitchin won an astounding landslide against an little-known

³² “Kitchin’s Great Speeches,” *Scotland Neck Commonwealth*, May 17, 1900.

opponent, 12,064 to 1,919. By 1916, one North Carolina man liked him so much that he suggested that Kitchin should run for the office of president: “Throw your hat in the ring as candidate for President of the United States; you are the one man who can lead your party to victory in November.” Towards the end of his career, Kitchin often ran unopposed for his congressional seat.³³

The methods used by Kitchin to win the 1900 did no lasting damage to his reputation. In the South, using violence to disfranchise blacks was a way of life. To the rest of the country, the use of violence in the region was tolerated because that was just how the southern states operated. Northerners rarely lost any sleep over black disfranchisement. After disfranchising African American voters in the “Black Second,” Kitchin did not spend much ink or breath on white supremacy, but that ideology truly dominated his first campaign. Throughout his career, despite his racism and activities organizing racist groups, he at least presented the façade that he would stick to the *noblesse oblige* ideal set forth by Governor Aycock. And Kitchin’s legacy in the ensuing century became far more linked with the American role in the Great War than with disfranchising black voters.³⁴

Kitchin’s views on race relations were very much in step with the rest of the white South, and indeed, whites throughout the country. President Theodore Roosevelt stirred

³³ Arnett, *Kitchin*, 25; *Congressional Record*, 57th Congress, 1st Session, 1901, 47; Anderson, *Race and Politics*, 350; *Raleigh News and Observer*, November 4, 1904; A. Fairbrother to Kitchin, March 3, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers. The voting age population, including whites and blacks, of the Second District was 52,472 in 1900 and 62,094 in 1910. Calculations by author based on the *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Statistics for North Carolina*, 597-613.

³⁴ Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 306-307; Stephen Budiansky, *The Bloody Shirt: Terror After Appomattox* (New York: Viking, 2008), 221-254.

national controversy when he invited black men to receptions at the White House on more than one occasion, with Booker T. Washington the most famous invitee. Kitchin was never invited to attend the same functions but indicated that he would most likely not attend the same event as a black man. When a Republican colleague challenged his racist attitudes on the floor of Congress, Kitchin got the Kansas Representative to agree that he would not accept the same invitation either.³⁵

Kitchin's personal feelings about African Americans were well known to all of his colleagues. He fought hard before his election to Congress to prevent black North Carolinians from enjoying the same rights as their white counterparts. Those actions were not lost on the Congressman that Kitchin replaced, Republican George White. An African American, White used one of his last speeches in the House to plead with his colleagues to protect "colored" rights in the face of a man who fought so hard to strip them away. In fact, one of Kitchin's first speeches in the campaign to unseat White was a two-hour exhortation to a white supremacist audience to halt black hopes of domination over white people.³⁶

When it came to more serious racial matters than dinner invitations or voting rights, Kitchin struggled to show a human side, as his mixed messaging on lynching revealed. With the South under increasing pressure to condemn lynching, Kitchin

³⁵ *Raleigh News and Observer*, January 27, 1903; *Congressional Record*, 58th Congress, 2nd Session, 1904, 2565.

³⁶ Benjamin R. Justesen, *George Henry White: An Even Chance in the Race of Life* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 291-292; Anderson, *Race and Politics*, 303; George H. White, "Defense of the Negro Race – Charges Answered," Speech of Hon. George H. White, of North Carolina, in the House of Representatives, January 29, 1901, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/whitegh/whitegh.html>.

responded that everyone should deplore violent vigilante tactics. Pressed on whether he considered lynching an appropriate response to rape, Kitchin could neither condemn nor defend the practice in cases of alleged rape, while conceding that the cries of a lynched man's family made him uneasy. Only a month later in Congress, before a national audience, Kitchin was more willing to explain, "I do not defend, nor do we in the South defend, lynching for any crime . . . except the unspeakable crime against womanhood." His vacillation continued, however, as he declined to condemn lynching, while agreeing that "we [should not] advocate or encourage lynching even [in cases involving alleged rape]." That speech did not translate into much action on his part to combat lynching in North Carolina. Admittedly, Kitchin's motive for this line may have had more to do with embarrassing President Roosevelt, who had advocated for vigilante justice for lesser crimes, than in explaining his own personal feelings.³⁷

Kitchin's unwillingness to speak up on the subject of lynching, specifically in instances of rape, highlighted the typical southern attitude toward race relations. Most white southerners agreed that whites and blacks should be kept in separate spheres, with whites obviously above the blacks in terms of social standing. All of the evidence indicates that Kitchin was fine with this arrangement. It seemed that he just preferred to turn a blind eye to lynching rather than to make any major changes to prevent the practice from continuing. About 9 lynchings took place in Kitchin's district, with 26 statewide,

³⁷ *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 30, 1904; *Congressional Record*, 58th Congress, 2nd Session, 1904, 5395.

during his terms in office. The state total from post-Reconstruction to 1968 was probably 101 people lynched in North Carolina.³⁸

During his first few years in Congress, Kitchin made no major speeches despite the promise he had shown around North Carolina as a master orator earlier in his life. There was little notice of him nationally except as the younger brother of William W. Kitchin, if that was even worth noticing. His early committee assignments in Congress were minor. He was put on the Claims and Expenditures and the State Department committees in his first session. Remarkably, he gained a reputation of being shy and quiet, despite being well-known in his home state as a charismatic speechmaker. His quiet demeanor and perceived shyness in Congress were chalked up to laziness by some of his colleagues, but it later came to light that Claude was quietly doing the little things which would in time become the standard of his work ethic: routine committee work, studying, observing, and thinking. There are anecdotes that support his being a generally shy person early in his national career. That is, while he proved his worth as a public orator, he was not usually keen on conversations. He avoided large gatherings in Washington D.C. When he had to make an official appearance in some Washington event, he would walk his wife, Maria, to the door and then retreat back to the street or sit on his car while she completed the chore of the receiving line. He did put his excellent

³⁸ White, *The Republic for Which It Stands*, 740-746; LeeAnn Whites, "Love, Hate, Rape, Lynching: Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Gender Politics of Racial Violence," in Timothy Tyson and David Cecelski, eds., *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 131-146; Martha Quillin, "How Many African Americans were lynched in North Carolina," *Raleigh News and Observer*, January 29, 2019.

oration skills to use in small group settings when possible, earning the reputation as an incomparable cloak room debater.³⁹

Kitchin finally delivered his first major House speech in 1904. It was a criticism of Republican hypocrisy concerning President Theodore Roosevelt. The speech addressed two goals. First, Kitchin wanted to respond to recent challenges he faced on the subject of race relations in his home region. And second, he wanted to point out how unqualified he believed Roosevelt was to hold the office of president, and further, to illustrate how embarrassing Roosevelt was as McKinley's vice-president. To address the issue of southern race relations, Kitchin noted that President Roosevelt publicly opposed lynching across the South as a punishment, but in one of the president's books, he advocated lynching as a punishment for the low crime of pony theft in western states. Kitchin was not necessarily defending lynching in this speech; rather, he seemed to assert that the punishment must fit the crime. For Kitchin, the only acceptable reason for a lynching was as a punishment for the rape of a white woman. To the other point, Kitchin noted that Roosevelt had criticized many previous presidents in his writings and was only picked as McKinley's vice-president to get him out of New York politics. Kitchin claimed "that Roosevelt would be a distasteful running mate for any American statesman." This speech, pointing out the Republican President's hypocrisy, was a huge hit in North Carolina and around the South.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Congressional Record*, 57th Congress, 1st Session, 1901, 244; Arnett, *Kitchin*, 32; Burton J. Hendrick, "New Democratic Leader in Congress," in Walter H. Page and Arthur W. Page, eds., *The World's Work: A History of Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1916), 139.

⁴⁰ "The Next Administration Exposure," *Weekly Star*, August 5, 1905; *Congressional Record*, 58th Congress, 2nd Session, 1904, 5393-5396.



Figure 2. Claude Kitchin Official Portrait.

After finding his national voice, Kitchin came to the first national matter that would make him well-known around the country: tariffs. As far as Kitchin was concerned, tariffs meant that special interests got rich at the expense of the everyday man from North Carolina, a common concern across the South. Southern congressmen often railed against high tariffs as unfair to the region. Kitchin wanted American manufacturers to move into foreign markets, and tariffs made that difficult. He argued that exporting American goods was key to growing the economy and first demonstrated his irritation by attacking the Payne-Aldrich Tariff in 1909. He specifically tackled a provision concerning lumber in the tariff, as North Carolina was a large producer of lumber that needed to be sent to foreign markets. His speech against the Payne-Aldrich Bill of 1909 was well received by many of his colleagues and secured him a spot on the Ways and Means Committee. There was some political wrangling necessary for Kitchin to become

⁴¹ Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives. Biographical Directory of the United States Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=K000250>.

a member of this committee, but that was achieved, and by early 1911, he was picked to serve.⁴²

Opposing high tariffs, as well as speaking out against policies of the now Taft-led Republican Administration, carried Kitchin through more elections in which he was unanimously picked by his party for the Second District seat. Leading up to the 1910 mid-terms, Kitchin toured his district and the state. He told his constituents that the Taft Administration was corrupt, but his key issue consistently remained the tariff. Kitchin won this reelection by a huge margin again. Now, securely in his seat in the House and as a member of one of the most important House committees, Kitchin began to exert more influence in the government.⁴³

In the election of 1912, Kitchin's old nemesis Theodore Roosevelt helped split the Republican ticket and made Wilson a feasible candidate for president. Claude and William Kitchin came out in favor of Wilson. The Kitchins shared many common goals with Wilson, as they were all progressive Democrats. The Kitchin brothers instructed the North Carolina delegation to vote for Wilson at the primary convention. Claude was overjoyed when Wilson was nominated by the Democrats and then sworn in as president. Indeed, Kitchin was in favor of the new president's "New Freedom" domestic agenda. The major issues that Wilson wanted action on –banking reform and tariff reform– represented policies that the Kitchins had long supported. It was only on international

⁴² C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 186, 317; *Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 1st Session, 1909, 583-601; Ingle, "Pilgrimage to Reform," 67-68.

⁴³ "Democratic Speakings," *Wilson Times*, October 26, 1910.

affairs that Kitchin and Wilson disagreed. There was never a dramatic public falling out between Kitchin and Wilson. The two only began drifting apart when the United States came closer and closer to entering the Great War.⁴⁴

By 1915, House Majority Leader Oscar Underwood, from Alabama, was ready to step down from that position in order to enter the Senate. Due to House seniority rules, the now-experienced Kitchin stood next in line for the role. In late December, it took 116 votes to elect him to that position, when at least 196 Democrats indicated that they were strongly in favor of Kitchin. He was unanimously honored by the Democratic Party by being chosen chairman of the Ways and Means Committee that year, and with that position came the title of Majority Leader. Democrats chose Kitchin for a few reasons. First, obviously, seniority dictated his selection. Second, he impressed everyone with his oratory and was eloquently ready to field any question at any time from his Republican opponents. And finally, he never lost his head and was always ready to debate a matter in a calm manner.⁴⁵

The Majority Leader is not usually the same person as the Speaker, although there are many cases where a person served in both offices, but never at the same time. The person that filled the roles of Speaker and Majority Leader have changed back and forth several times. For example, when Champ Clark became the Speaker of the House in the 62nd Congress, Oscar Underwood served as Majority Leader. Then, in 1915, Kitchin succeeded Underwood, who won election to the Senate, while Clark continued on as

⁴⁴ R. D. W. Connor, *North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1929), xliii; *New York Times*, February 10 and September 13, 1914.

⁴⁵ "Majority of Democrats for Kitchin," *Goldsboro Weekly Argus*, December 17, 1914.

Speaker. Clark and Kitchin flipped the party leader position twice more in the succeeding Congresses. The title “Majority Leader” only applies when the party is the majority in Congress. When the Republicans regained the majority in the 67th Congress, Kitchin became the minority leader.

Kitchin stepped into leadership of the Committee on Ways and Means as the youngest person to hold the position in over two decades. The Democratic caucus officially nominated him on February 4, 1915. Few Democrats had any doubt that Kitchin could handle the task though. He was already a “veteran legislator,” an “astute parliamentarian,” and a “rough and tumble debater.” Much of North Carolina was obviously ecstatic at the idea. The *Polk County News* called him North Carolina’s greatest congressman. The *Greensboro Daily News* said no one was nearly as qualified as Kitchin was to succeed Underwood.⁴⁶

At some points, there seemed to be some doubt if President Wilson would support the Democratic Party’s election of Kitchin to the office of Majority Leader. Kitchin was not always on the same page with the Wilson administration, and the question was raised, largely by the hostile northern press, about whether his Democratic colleagues should support him for a post often described as second in power only to the presidency. It was mainly northeastern newspapers that questioned Kitchin’s abilities, his relationship with Wilson, and various rumors about his stance as leader of the House. Kitchin was always quick to reassure his constituents that it was all “pure newspaper ‘fake-ism.’” There is

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, February 5, 1915; “The New Majority Leader,” *Farmer and Mechanic*, March 16, 1915; “Claude Kitchin,” *Polk County News*, February 12, 1915; “Claude Kitchin,” *Greensboro Daily News*, October 12, 1914.

absolutely nothing to it.” Kitchin had a running feud with many of the newspapers that posted sensational stories, which he considered false information. He responded to a letter written to him regarding a newspaper report on his views of the war-preparedness question, “I say this in the kindest spirit, but a busy man like you has not the time to read anything except the newspapers, and your letter is based on such information, which are not the facts.”⁴⁷

Despite any real or perceived reservations that the president might have held about Kitchin’s election to the position, he quickly earned the respect of his fellow officeholders, even those who had publicly held reservations about him taking on the post. Representative Augustus P. Gardner of Massachusetts told Kitchin that many Republicans doubted if he could handle the job early on because they regarded him as “a wit, not an intellectual,” but he had changed their minds, and they now viewed him as one of the best majority leaders produced by either party in recent memory. In part, these changed attitudes were due to Kitchin demonstrating the mature qualities necessary in the office, especially patience and the willingness to listen to his colleagues.⁴⁸

It is quite true that Kitchin butted heads with Wilson on foreign affairs issues. Although it is often difficult to figure out the exact motives of a person’s actions, there is a parallel one might draw between Kitchin and one of his predecessors. Kitchin followed in the footsteps, as a major congressional leader, of House Speaker Thomas Brackett Reed of Maine. Speaker Reed was a Republican who directly and passionately opposed

⁴⁷ Arnett, *Kitchin*, 42; Kitchin to R.H. White, February 17, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers; Kitchin to F.L. Moffett, February 29, 1915, Box 9, Kitchin Papers.

⁴⁸ A.P. Gardner to Kitchin, September 8, 1916, Box 14, Kitchin Papers.

his own party's president in his decision to enter a war against Spain in 1898. Reed did everything in his power to stop congressional resolutions that would recognize Cuban independence before the Spanish-American War was declared. Reed, like Kitchin after him, commanded so much respect in his own party that President McKinley would not dare openly advocate for a replacement. When Reed opposed American support of Cuban independence, he knew that both the U.S. Congress and the American people wanted a war. He was attacked in the papers and resented in the House for that stance. Kitchin truly mirrored Reed some two decades later under similar circumstances. This time it was a Democratic leader disagreeing with a president from his own party, rather than a Republican disagreeing with another Republican, and the circumstances of war were, of course, different.⁴⁹

Following in the footsteps of Reed, the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914 put Claude Kitchin and other Democrats, including a prominent group of populist-progressives that included Secretary of State William J. Bryan and Senator James K. Vardaman, on a collision course with President Wilson. Other anti-war Congressmen from around the country included Senator George Norris of Nebraska. Norris asked his fellow senators to "consider the terrible consequences of the step we are about to take" when considering the declaration of war. This type of sympathy fell on deaf ears when two days later the Senate voted 82-6 and the House voted 373-50 in favor of the declaration. There were other high-ranking government officials in North Carolina that supported Kitchin and, in general, opposed American entry to the World War. One

⁴⁹ Margaret Leech, *In the Days of McKinley* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 43-44 and 175-179.

amongst them was former state Attorney General and Mayor of Asheville, Theodore Davidson, who wrote a lengthy opinion piece questioning how ambiguous American neutrality actually had been, as well as many other state Democrats who came to office as Progressives.⁵⁰

There was a small group of Progressive Democrats who merit mention and comparison with Kitchin. As progressives, these men largely shared Kitchin's goals of reform from their various positions. When the Great War began and the United States began debating its role in world affairs, they also tried to prevent American involvement. Senator James Vardaman of Mississippi and Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan were both close allies of Claude Kitchin, especially during the preparedness period before 1917. Former Representative and future Senator Tom Watson of Georgia could also be included in this group of southerners in opposition to American entry. Most historians agree that Watson was one of the "loudest and most persistent voice[s] of discontent" other than Kitchin through the preparedness period, and Watson surely approved of Kitchin's opposition. Most southern congressmen were shocked by the suddenness of the World War, but only a select few took such a strong stance against America's involvement in it.⁵¹

Historians have surmised that in the early twentieth century, most southern white Democrats fell into three different categories: the conservatives, the agrarians, and the

⁵⁰ Congressional Record, 65th Congress, 1st session, 1917, 212-213; "Conflict with Norris," *Greensboro Daily News*, March 25, 1917.

⁵¹ Zachary Smith, "Tom Watson and Resistance to Federal War Policies in Georgia during World War I," *Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 2 (May 2012): 296.

progressives. Most progressives came from small towns and cities, while the conservatives and agrarians represented very different rural interests. Kitchin rose to office as a Progressive and was profoundly influenced by an extraordinary situation that faced the South from Reconstruction through the 1890s. A host of economic factors led southern, agricultural areas into despair and resentment. Farmers in the region recognized the need to organize in order to protect their own interests, and many joined the Farmers' Alliance. The Alliance began as a cooperative organization but quickly learned its potential political power. When it became clear that the Alliance was not strong enough, many turned to the Populist Party. Others, especially after the Panic of 1893, joined the Populist-Republican fusion party, which sputtered out after the Fusionists were ousted by a new crop of Democrats with populist ideas, Kitchin among them. Much of the disgruntlement among these farmers and fusionists came from racism. Southern progressivism seemed like it might be the answer to these different factions. By 1900, the Democratic Party in North Carolina found a man with progressive policies who was also eager to disfranchise black voters, Charles Aycock. Aycock's election signaled the end to opposition parties in the state.⁵²

The Progressive Era in the United States is usually remembered in terms of its domestic successes and failures. America's preparation for, and eventual involvement in,

⁵² Jeannette Keith, *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class, and Power in the Rural South during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 16; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*; Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951); Karl E. Campbell, "The First and Second World War Generations of North Carolina Political Leadership" in Shepherd W. McKinley and Steven Sabol eds., *North Carolina's Experience during the First World War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018), 174.

the Great War can be examined from progressivism's internationalist element. Progressives were split over the methods that they should use to fulfill their mission beyond American shores. President Wilson eventually came to believe that American participation in the war would grant him a seat at the peacemaking table. In his view, he could shape the peace with progressive ideals employed on a worldwide basis. Other progressives believed that forcing their ideals would not work and preferred a gradual reform to the world order, as a byproduct of America's example, rather than an enforcement. One of the tactics used by progressive opponents of preparedness had been to raise the income tax on the rich to pay for increased military costs. They assumed that the enthusiasm of industrialists would lessen if they were forced to pay higher taxes for the coming war.⁵³

Kitchin and William J. Bryan became acquainted before the World War, as they were both products of the progressive agrarian movement and formed a lifelong friendship. Kitchin looked up to Bryan even though they were relatively close in age. Indeed, when Kitchin took the House floor in April 1917, he wore a Bryan-style bolo tie. Bryan represented much of what Kitchin held close to his heart and he could usually look to Bryan for an example, if he ever needed one. The two kept in close touch throughout the 1910s, but Bryan refrained from giving Kitchin any strategic advice on how to deal with the preparedness movement, especially after Bryan's resignation as secretary of

⁵³ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003); N. Gordon Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 1-10; David Traxel, *Crusader Nation: The United States in Peace and the Great War, 1889-1920* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 283.

state. There was a mutual give and take between the pair. Kitchin usually benefitted the most from these exchanges, but he was always sure to trust his own judgement. Bryan often commended his stance on important questions. They did not agree on every issue, of course. Prohibition and the anti-evolution crusade did not concern Kitchin very much at all, for example. But Bryan's advice on any topic was always welcome.⁵⁴

Kitchin also had much in common with Senator James K. Vardaman, a white supremacist from Mississippi who generally supported Wilson's domestic agenda. Like Kitchin, Vardaman and Wilson disagreed over foreign policy. Unlike Kitchin, Vardaman's opposition to Wilson and the war policies eventually derailed his political career. He was a very outspoken proponent of neutrality. He learned from his own experiences with the Spanish-American War that while many people may have had humanitarian reasons for advocating American intervention, bankers and businessmen turned the conflict into an imperialistic conquest. And Vardaman did not want to see military interventions for financial gain become a trend in the United States. He reasoned that humanitarianism should drive American forces to Europe, not profit. Vardaman and Kitchin corresponded frequently and often heaped praise on one another for their shared views against war preparedness.⁵⁵

Another parallel can be drawn with the experience of Tom Watson of Georgia, another advocate of white supremacy who has been described by historians as "the most trusted Populist in Georgia." Like Kitchin, Watson was born and raised in a small, rural

⁵⁴ Kazin, *Godly Hero*, 248 and 254; Arnett, *Kitchin*, 116.

⁵⁵ William F. Holmes, *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 294-297 and 370.

southern region, where he also spent most of his life. Watson's father also served in the Confederate Army. Unlike the Kitchin family, the Watsons lost several close family members, and their family suffered complete financial ruin. One important trait shared by both Kitchin and Watson was a gift for oratory. As war was raging in Europe, Watson employed his gift to object to the increasing militarism in America and to Wilson's actions as president that promoted war preparedness.⁵⁶

Much of Watson's rhetoric against the United States joining in the Great War was reminiscent of Kitchin's own. They both spoke in similar language while trying to prevent American entry, decrying the "jingoism and war traffickers." In the 1910s though, Watson was only a civilian and did not have the same political power as Kitchin, Bryan, and Vardaman did. However, in the late teens, Watson ran a nationally known and popular newspaper, so his voice was still felt around the country.⁵⁷

Kitchin was neither pro-German nor pro-British. Many different motives were attributed to Kitchin's anti-war policies before April 1917. Alex Arnett asserted that, "The charge that [Kitchin] was a pro-German [should] be dismissed as absurd." Kitchin's heritage, as well as that of most of his constituents, was almost wholly of British stock, and he had no connections to German or pro-German groups in America. On the other hand, Kitchin, like much of the South, detested the British domination of shipping and trade, as it had a detrimental effect on cotton and tobacco growers and timber producers,

⁵⁶ C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), 2, 6, 25, and 161; Smith, "Tom Watson," 299.

⁵⁷ Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 360-410; Smith, "Tom Watson," 313; George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 42-43; Jeanette Keith, "The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance, 1917-1918," *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 4 (March 2001): 1354.

especially in North Carolina. When Britain threatened to blockade American cotton from going to Germany, a huge cry rang out among southern cotton growers against British imperialism. Kitchin, like most of his contemporaries, had reason to disapprove of both sides, and any possible accusation that he had some secret, or nefarious, motive to support either Imperial Germany or Great Britain should be dismissed immediately. The answer is simpler; in short, he wanted to join neither side of this war, and he and many of his constituents saw no benefit from the United States entering the Great War.⁵⁸

As both President Wilson and Kitchin were Democrats, it did come as a small shock to the nation when Kitchin resisted the President's intention of a declaration of war. To that point, there were disagreements between the two on the handling of the preparedness issue. Indeed, the Majority Leader resisted Wilson on nearly every issue that involved expanding America's role in world affairs, despite their agreement on nearly every domestic issue. There were rumors that Kitchin detested the Wilson administration on a personal level, but these were groundless. There is no evidence that would suggest a personal feud. If their relationship was strained, it was a result of their opposing views on preparedness, rather than the cause of any tension between the two politicians.⁵⁹

Claude Kitchin dazzled through the prewar period. His birth and upbringing were far from humble, and he emerged on the national stage prepared for the roles he later

⁵⁸ Arnett, *Kitchin*, 115-116.

⁵⁹ Obviously, most, but not all, white southern representatives in the 1910s were Democrats. The American people would generally expect officials from the same party to vote for and believe in similar ideals. Therefore, Kitchin's dissent was a bit shocking.

assumed. When he came to the United States House of Representatives, there was no way he, or anyone, could know the great challenge that would come to the country with the Great War. His name became associated around the country as one of the leading anti-preparedness champions. Perhaps the Great Man Theory comes into play with Kitchin, to some extent. There was a role to fill, someone needed to be the “anti-war” voice in government to challenge Wilson’s growing fondness for militarism, and Kitchin filled that role. He continued his fight against war preparedness by speaking out against increases in naval and army spending throughout 1916 and into 1917.

Newly elected governor Locke Craig announced that a new era was beginning for North Carolina when he delivered his inaugural address in 1913. Craig instituted and supported progressive policies, authorized the building of new infrastructure including modern roads and railroads, and continued the education reforms of his predecessor, Governor Charles Aycock. Despite the European War hindering American economics, Craig described his first two years in office as an era of substantial progress for the state. Agriculture and industry improved in those years because farmers and manufacturers realized the need to diversify their crops and goods produced. For white North Carolinians, the outlook for the coming years was good. They had no notion that the world would soon be at war, and eventually eighty-six thousand Tar Heels would be off to fight in it.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ May F. Jones, ed. *Public Letters and Papers of Locke Craig: Governor of North Carolina, 1913-1917*, (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company State Printers, 1916), 24-28.

CHAPTER III

CONFRONTING A WORLD AT WAR: CLAUDE KITCHIN, NORTH CAROLINA, AND AMERICA, 1914-1915

Please permit me to thank you for your letter of the 7th, endorsing my position with respect to the so-called preparedness program proposed by the Administration. As you say, it is all craze. I am confident that if the people knew the real facts and situation, an overwhelming majority of them would oppose it as earnestly as I do.

--Claude Kitchin to Earl P. Tatham

When Claude Kitchin took office as North Carolina's Second District Congressman on March 4, 1901, he assumed the seat his father lost almost twenty years earlier, beginning with the 57th Congress. Like his father, Kitchin entered the position while the United States was at relative peace, as the Philippine-American War began to draw to a close shortly after his swearing in. The country was coming to terms with its global power, following victory over a much-weakened Spain. Theodore Roosevelt's Big Stick Diplomacy and the Great White Fleet announced to the world that the United States had finally joined the international community as a great power, but the United States maintained that it would only use its power if threatened. The domestic economy was thriving after the Depression of 1893 ended, and the country was beginning to see social, economic, and environmental change due to the progressive movement.

In 1914, Europe had been on the verge of military conflict for at least a decade when the Great War finally broke out. There were numerous incidents, such as the two Moroccan Crises of 1905 and 1911, the Fashoda Incident, and the series of German naval

bills that panicked Great Britain from 1898-1912, that could have easily been the spark that finally set off the continent. The European alliance system, which was intended to keep the continent at peace after the Congress of Vienna early in the previous century, created rivalries and laid the foundations for a gargantuan conflict. Nationalism encouraged by compulsory education systems was a relatively new idea by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but it guaranteed a magnitude of available young men ready to die for their countries. Economic imperialism existed for centuries across Europe, but the relative newcomer on the world power stage, Germany, challenged the status quo and guaranteed a truly global conflict overseas with Great Britain. Industrialized militarism led to the creation of millions of new guns and other weapons of death, which were put to terribly effective uses in the succeeding years.

These are the generally accepted underlying causes of the Great War for the major European powers involved, and they did not all happen at the snap of a finger. It took the assassination of the heir to a centuries-old throne to ignite this war, but as mentioned, it could have been any number of sparks in the decade prior to 1914 that finally drew the continent into the fight. In short, Europe had been slowly preparing for the World War ever since the last continental maelstrom ended. Historians and scholars from every nation that participated in the war produced multi-volume tomes to explain how and why they believed the war started. Most of these volumes contradict one another, each blaming another country. Some suggested that a war was inevitable, while others simply lay the blame on the hands of their adversaries. In recent historiography, some scholars

have argued that the war was more “improbable” than “inevitable.” In either case, Europe was ready for it and had been for decades.¹

The United States, on the other hand, was not preparing for a European war, let alone a World War in 1914. Aside from the Spanish-American War two decades prior and the Mexican American War over a half century earlier, the United States seemed to have little interest in large-scale conflicts abroad. And indeed, those two wars against different Spanish-speaking nations were undertaken by the United States with the full thought and confidence that America would achieve easy and quick victories in each.²

When President Woodrow Wilson finally dragged the United States into the Great War in mid-1917, America was hardly equipped or prepared to fight, despite a few years of preparedness campaigns undertaken by the federal government, and at its urging, state governments after the European war erupted. The United States took nearly a full year to actively engage with the enemy on the battlefields of France and Belgium after the declaration of war finally came in April of 1917. By the time of American entry, the French and British were in desperate need of fresh young men to throw at the Germans after Russia surrendered during its own revolution, but the Allies would have to wait a little longer than expected for the Doughboys.³

¹ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper, 2013), xxiii-xxxi and Chapters 3-6; Jörn Leonard, *Pandora's Box: A History of the First World War*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), Chapters 1-2.

² Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 744-791; Paul A. C. Koinstinen, *Mobilizing for Modern War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865-1919* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 9-10.

³ John P. Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914-1917* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 5-21.

The Balkan Peninsula meant little to North Carolinians in 1914. Few people in the Tar Heel State claimed birth in or heritage from the lands of either the Austro-Hungarian Empire or the Balkan region. Local newspapers mentioned the region only occasionally through the first decade of the twentieth century. During heated conflicts on the peninsula known as the Balkan Wars, in which several Balkan nations battled the Ottoman Empire, North Carolina took note of a war “threatened in the Balkans” and what the *Mebane Leader* called “the Flurry in the Balkans,” buried in page three of a weekly reader. Neither paper went into any great detail about the background of why this potential war was coming, but like much of the rest of North Carolina, they simply noted that war was coming, and when it arrived, they noted the combatants. These two headlines, neither from the front page, represented all of the information that the average North Carolinian would have about a relatively small conflict in a region that was an ocean away and on the other side of Europe.⁴

Marking the conclusion of the Second Balkan War on July 18, 1913, the *Marshall News-Record* included an image of the kings of Greece, Bulgaria, Servia (as Serbia was then usually called) and their troops and noted in a column that the war was ending. An article explained that “as long as the Balkan states did nothing to upset the decisions already agreed to among the powers [at war]. . . it was hoped that no power would find it necessary to take any action” likely to raise more difficulty in the region. With such

⁴ “War Threatened in the Balkans,” *Enterprise*, October 4, 1912; “The Flurry in the Balkans,” *Mebane Leader*, October 10, 1912; *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Statistics for North Carolina*, 591. I counted Austria and Hungary in the 281 but excluded Greece because the point here is to examine Balkan nations either in or heavily influenced by the Empire of Austria-Hungary. The census supplement listed an “all other” category but did not specify the continent, therefore I excluded that tally.

limited information, how could North Carolinians possibly know that merely a year later events would launch themselves into action which would ultimately send Tar Heel soldiers to fight in a war an ocean away?⁵

In the spring of 1914, there were rumors in the Balkans that the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, intended to visit Sarajevo to review his subjects in the city. Eventually, the Austrian leadership settled on June 28. That date was a deliberate choice intended to help solidify Austrian rule of the distinctly non-Austrian region. The date was a Serbian holiday called Vidovdan, which celebrated a great military victory from centuries ago. A Serbian nationalist organization, the Black Hand, hatched a plan to assassinate the heir on his trip through the city on this special day. Seven youths were recruited, given guns and small bombs, and placed strategically on the parade route to carry out the assassination. One of the recruits, Gavrilo Princip, had little reason to be nervous as he was sixth in position of assassins and had good reason to believe that the Archduke would be dead well before he was expected to reach Princip's spot on the route. The heir's motorcade set out on the city tour under the assumption that it would be safe in its own empire.⁶

The first would-be assassin got cold feet and was unable to throw his bomb. The second acted but missed and injured several officers accompanying the Archduke but did not touch the heir himself. The motorcade picked up speed and stunned the remaining assassins into inaction. Defeated, they trailed into the city, Princip stopped at a café-

⁵ "Former Allies Now Fight Each Other," *Marshall News-Record*, July 18, 1913.

⁶ Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, Chapters 1-3.

delicatessen called the Moritz Schiller for a failed post assassination-attempt coffee.

Meanwhile, the Archduke's driver began a new route to the hospital so that the heir could check on the condition of his injured officers. This route went right past the Moritz Schiller where a caffeinated Princip sat. Large crowds were gathered to see Archduke Ferdinand, which brought the car to a standstill, mere feet from Princip. The teenager drew his pistol and shot both the heir and his wife Sophie. Both died quickly.⁷

Most North Carolinians could probably not say exactly where Sarajevo was on a map. Perhaps even the 281 recent immigrants and children of immigrants from Austria or Hungary, who resided in the Tar Heel State, would struggle to find the city. Details about the assassination in an obscure part of the world would have confused them even more. The European system itself, with the strange alliances, secret deals, and numerous monarchs, probably confused most Americans who preferred their politics the same as their wars, black-and-white. They preferred to think that George Washington won the American War for Independence and King George III lost it, or that the Union won the Civil War and the Confederacy lost it. Wars were supposed to be cut and dry, as far as Americans were concerned. There should be two sides with clear motives, actions, and outcomes. But in Europe, unknown people fought for unknown reasons on a continent that Americans believed sensible people left long ago. Most Americans based their views

⁷ For a full account of the day of the assassination, including a detailed background of Vidovdan, the assassins, and the Archduke, see Alan Axelrod, *How America Won World War I: The U.S. Military Victory in the Great War – The Causes, the Course, and the Consequences* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2018), introduction; Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 3-12. Axelrod misspelled "Vidovdan" as "Vidovan."

of Europe, if they had any, on “the double principle of abstention from European politics and the exclusion of European interference from American affairs.”⁸

By early July, Tar Heel newspapers were documenting news of the assassination as just another incident of violence from a world away, much the same as they reported on the Balkan Wars in the previous years. The *Charlotte Daily Observer* noted that a “war cloud covers all Europe and huge forces are moving” but quickly moved on to matters that would be more pressing to an American audience. To reinforce the obscurity of the incident, the names of neither assassin nor assassinated were spelled consistently across the state. One local paper even included a list of “assassinations of [exalted] personages,” as if it had to emphasize the seriousness of this one. The list included presidents, sultans, czars, kings, princes, and others to explain that the assassination of the Archduke was important and not just another common murder. North Carolinians obviously did not understand European politics and did not care about those foreign assassinations.⁹

However, no one in or out of Europe could see the magnitude of what would follow the Archduke’s death. For example, the Kaiser of Germany spent most of July sailing on his yacht around the Baltic Sea. Beneath the surface of this tranquility was a series of frantic messages and telegrams between Berlin, Vienna, Belgrade (Serbia’s

⁸ Axelrod, *How America Won World War I*, xiv; Charles Seymour, *American Diplomacy During the World War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1934), 1-4.

⁹ Sarah M. Lemmon, *North Carolina’s Role in the First World War* (Raleigh: Division of Archive and History, 1975), 1; “Assassinations of [Exalted] Personages in All Countries in the Last Fifty Years,” *Mebane Leader*, July 9, 1914. For inconsistent spellings, see “Heir to Throne Killed,” *Roanoke Beacon*, July 3, 1914, in which the Archduke’s name is turned to “Francis Ferdinand,” and “Franz Joseph, of Austria,” *Roanoke News*, July 2, 1914, in which he is referred to as “Franz Ferdinand.”

capital), and Moscow. One of these messages included the now infamous “blank cheque,” in which Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg promised Germany’s “faithful support” to Vienna in whatever measure it took against Serbia. The culmination of these communiques was Austria’s Ultimatum to Serbia on July 23, which Vienna knew Belgrade would not accept. Serbia delivered its reply to Austria on July 28, which was rebuffed with a declaration of war. Austria then moved its army to commence the artillery shelling of Belgrade and the war began.¹⁰

Over the course of the ensuing days and weeks every major country in Europe would be involved in the war. Russia mobilized every man who had been through his required military training and came to Serbia’s aid against Austria due to a defensive treaty based on a shared Slavic heritage. Germany then was obligated to respond against Russia based on its own treaty with Austria. In order to subvert the much larger Russian army, Germany moved quickly and declared war on Russia. France was required then to intervene against Germany based on its own defensive treaty with Russia. Russia was a backward country with antiquated railroads and communications, and Germany knew that France was stronger and would be more difficult to deal with than Russia. Therefore, Germany had to go on the offensive against France, which required passage through Belgium. Germany had been prepared for this exact possibility for about a decade and developed a secret strategy called the *Schlieffen Plan* to deal with a two-front war. However, Belgium had an agreement for protection against German aggression from

¹⁰ Sean McMeekin, *July 1914: Countdown to War* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), Chapters 5-18. “Cheque” is the preferred spelling in nearly all sources.

Great Britain, and when Germans crossed the Belgian border, the British were forced to intervene. Italy and the Ottoman Turks would take a few extra months to get involved, but they both eventually did. The sides were set for the ensuing war, but they were very confusing to the Americans who had no conceptions of European alliances.¹¹

In late June 1914, in a corner of Europe that most North Carolinians would struggle to find on a map then and now, the Great War started, and the national debate about America's role in world affairs began to heat up to a boiling point. The United States enjoyed its role as a world power without any real responsibilities through the aughts, but it was clear by Christmas 1914 that the European conflict was not going to end anytime soon. Indeed, several North Carolinian newspapers offered a yearly timeline of events at the start of a new year concerning the war in Europe. Nationwide, Americans wondered if or when the United States would have to send her boys "over there." The great debate about America's war-preparedness had begun.¹²

In Kitchin's first week as Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and Majority Leader, Germany declared the territorial waters of Ireland and Great Britain, including the whole of the English Channel, to be a war zone. While the World War had been raging in Europe and parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East for many months, there was still hope in the Old World that it would come to a quick conclusion. The fantastical "home by Christmas of 1914" idea had passed, but there was no real signal in

¹¹ Max Hastings, *Catastrophe 1914: Europe Goes to War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), Chapter 2; McMeekin, *July 1914*, Chapters 19 - 25.

¹² "Second Year of War Reviewed," *Roanoke Beacon*, August 4, 1916; "History of 1916 Told in Brief," *Roanoke Beacon*, January 5, 1917; "History of 1916 Told in Brief," *Farmville Enterprise*, January 5, 1917. Several papers statewide offered a "history of [the previous year] told in brief" or "year of the war reviewed" to recap major events such as a city being captured or Zeppelin raid on a major city.

early 1915 that the war would continue for several more years. As such, in the early months of the war, the United States debated with itself about its own state of war preparedness, but the idea of America needing to enter the conflict was still far off. Germany's declaration of the war zone around Great Britain and Ireland would be the catalyst that ramped up the conversation. American ships were not immediately lost after the statement, but American lives would soon be in jeopardy as passengers through these waters.¹³

After assuming the role as Chairman of Ways and Means, Kitchin was even more well known around the country and prepared himself to face the challenges of the national spotlight. In a speech to the Virginia Bankers Association during the preparedness controversy, Oswald Villard said of Kitchin, "He has given us an example of courage and outspokenness of which the South and the Nation may well be proud. He refused to swallow his convictions at the party behest, he refused to yield to the blandishments and exaltations of the compromising politician in the White House. He was deaf to threats that he would lose his House leadership; deaf to threats to defeat him in his own district, which has triumphantly sustained him as did his party associates. His prestige has waxed as Mr. Wilson's has steadily waned." Among allies like Villard, Kitchin was obviously well respected and liked. His opponents who disagreed with him also appreciated the sincerity of his convictions.¹⁴

¹³ *New York Times*, February 12, 1915.

¹⁴ Oswald Garrison Villard, Speech to Virginia Bankers Association, June 23, 1916, Box 12, Kitchin Papers.

The earliest drumbeats for war in the United States were sounding at the same time that the now famous Christmas Truce was underway in Europe. Congressional war hawks pressured President Wilson to begin preparations in the United States for war almost immediately after the July Crisis. The president ignored these calls for preparation until German submarine attacks on Allied merchant ships ramped up in 1915. By autumn, Wilson finally gave in to the advocates of American preparedness, including his advisor, Colonel Edward House, and began listening to their advice on the matter. Many of the earliest preparedness advocates were eastern Republicans and men in industry and banking who stood to profit from American involvement in the war. There were many other organizations that formed around the country to meet the needs of an international crisis.¹⁵

One of the most prominent pro-preparedness organizations that emerged was the National Security League (NSL). At its zenith, the NSL boasted more than one hundred thousand members, many of whom privately admitted that they were more sympathetic to the Allied cause than to the German one. The base of this League was industrialists, bankers, and Republicans in the manufacturing regions of the United States, but they also drew in Democrats and progressives. These Americans had a considerable stake in an Allied victory the longer the war dragged on, due to increased loans and sales of weapons and ammunition to the Allies. In the early years of the European war, the NSL did not advocate for immediate American intervention. However, the organization pushed for

¹⁵ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 125-140.

measures that were designed to militarize American society. It advocated for a bigger army, an expanded navy, and a system of universal military training.¹⁶

There were numerous groups on the other side of the preparedness question in the United States. Pacifists, socialists, radicals, isolationists, German and Irish Americans, and many ordinary citizens in the Midwest and South all counseled against entering the European war. “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” was among the most popular songs in the United States in 1915. Critics claimed that the song only emphasized how unprepared the nation was for war. The song’s author, Alfred Bryan, explained that he wrote it in good faith to highlight American civility against European barbarism. The song led to many pro-preparedness parody versions in response, most of which criticized its perceived pacifist message. Nevertheless, it reached the top of the charts for two months, emphasizing to the world that the United States certainly was divided over the war.¹⁷

While the so-called great powers of Europe were creating huge armies and building millions of weapons for war, American peace advocates and anti-war organizations employed every argument they could muster against the militarization of the United States in the early twentieth century. When the Great War began, peace advocates shifted their focus to oppose the American preparedness movement. After

¹⁶ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 30-32; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Confusions and Crises, 1915-1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), Chapter 2; John W. Chambers, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 82.

¹⁷ John Roger Paas, ed., *America Sings of War: American Sheet Music from World War I* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 18; Mark W. Van Wienen, *Partisans and Poets: The Political World of American Poetry in the Great War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56-73; “Notices,” *Daily Telegram*, September 23, 1915; “Notices,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, April 25, 1915.

some time, in a dramatic shift of policy, many of those American peace organizations existed on paper only. Many of their official stances on the World War stated that the only way to achieve a lasting world peace in the midst of the destruction wrought by the Great War was for the United States to get involved, as the last hope to save the Old World from itself.

By 1917, the American Peace Society had moved dramatically far from name and proclaimed, “We must help in the bayoneting of a normally decent German soldier in order to free him from a tyranny which he at present accepts . . . We must lend our help in widowing a good-hearted and kindly German woman in order to save her and her children. . . we must aid in the starvation and emaciation of a German baby” to protect future German babies. This sensationalized suggestion of starving German babies did not sit well with all peace advocates in the United States. A Prussian-born, naturalized American, railroad tycoon, who was later arrested for disloyalty in Louisiana, wrote to Kitchin begging the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee to pressure the Allies to allow milk products to be sent to Germany and Austria so that the seven million babies therein would not starve to death.¹⁸

There were many other peace and pacifist groups, composed mainly of middle-class feminists and pacifists, who continued to oppose growing American involvement in the war and steps toward militarizing the United States. Kitchin sympathized with these

¹⁸ Charles Chatfield, *The American Peace Movement: Ideals and Activism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 39-40; “Peace-Societies Lining Up For War,” *Literary Digest*, 54, no. 14 (April 7, 1917): 1705; “Railway President Held as Seditionist; William Edenborn, Naturalized German, Accused of Disloyal Speech in Louisiana,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1918; Mr. and Mrs. William Edenborn to Claude Kitchin, March 9, 1916, Box 10, Claude Kitchin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

groups. He, and many saner voices than those of the American Peace Society, continued to advocate for American neutrality through 1917. To many peace advocates, the European war remained Europe's problem. While it is true that American interests were threatened, Kitchin and these others were convinced that the United States was still not under any substantial threat. The real core of the anti-preparedness forces in the United States were southern and western Democrats. Historians tend to agree that Kitchin led this group.¹⁹

On the surface, the United States had no reason to enter a war with any of the belligerents in Europe. President Wilson quickly announced that "a state of war unhappily exists" but warned Americans that they should remain neutral in action and thought. When the war was drawing closer to America, Georgian Tom Watson asked his fellow Americans what many people around North Carolina and the southern United States were asking themselves, "Do you want your son killed in Europe in a quarrel you have nothing to do with?" Since 1815, America's relationships with most European powers had been stable. President George Washington warned the nation to avoid entangling foreign alliances in his farewell address. For over a century, succeeding presidents heeded his warning. Aside from the war against Spain in 1898, the United States only looked to Europe for trading partners for the better part of a century. Historical and social links to Great Britain made the British America's biggest trading partner, but France, Russia, Germany, and others all proved to be worthy destinations for

¹⁹ Link, *Confusions*, 27-28; Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 110-111; Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon*, 122-124; Jeanette Keith, *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class, and Power in the Rural South during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 21-22.

nineteenth-century American exports. In addition to ordinary imports such as finished goods and products, the major European import in the nineteenth century was immigrants.²⁰

Great waves of immigrants from all of the countries in Europe crossed the Atlantic in the nineteenth century and continued to come through the early twentieth century. English and French immigrants were well represented in the early years. German and Irish immigrants came through the mid-century. Southern and eastern Europeans populated the last great wave of immigration. By 1914, America was composed of persons who could claim heritage in of all the belligerent powers. Some groups, especially the more recent immigrants, took time to assimilate, but most could claim they were Americans first by the outbreak of war.²¹

The issues of loyalty and national identity may have caused some Americans to wonder how some of the more recent immigrants to the United States felt about their “homelands” fighting in the war. While America was still far away from entering the war, these topics were at the front of a national conversation as war broke out in Europe in the early twentieth century. Outside of the South, most cities boasted substantial immigrant populations. In huge northern cities such as New York City, Philadelphia, or Boston, one might expect a high degree of influence on the local government from recent immigrants,

²⁰ Ray S. Baker and William E. Dodd, eds., *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925-1927), August 4, 1914; Jeanette Keith, “The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance, 1917-1918: Class, Race, and Conscription in the Rural South,” *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 4 (2001): 1354.

²¹ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), Chapter 2; Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), Part II.

or second-generation Americans, based on loyalties to their motherland. In the later years of the war, for example, many Irish American newspapers were banned from the mail by the United States Post Office on the grounds of national security concerns and potential trouble from recent Irish immigrants. However, these issues did not come up very much in North Carolina.²²

The presence of large numbers of immigrants complicated America's response to the war. Experts estimated that about thirty-three million Americans were themselves foreign born or of foreign parentage in 1917, with twenty-eight million of them from countries engaged in the war. The numbers were not as dramatic in North Carolina however. There was a small number of foreign born and first-generation immigrants living in the state. As of 1910, there were 2,206,287 people residing in the Old North State. About 1.5 million were white and a little under 700,000 were black. Only 14,793 of the white population were foreign born or of foreign parentage. If these recent immigrants' loyalty still rested with their nation of origin, their sympathies, with either side of the belligerent nations at war, would have been split. About 7,000 foreign born or first-generation North Carolinians originated in Allied or Allied-leaning countries, and 5,000 originated in Central Power or Central-leaning countries. Of course, every person is unique and many of these new Tar Heels would likely have embraced America ahead of any other country, for any number of reasons, the same as many recent immigrants in the large northern cities did.²³

²² Michael P. Mulcrone, "The World War I Censorship of the Irish-American Press" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1993).

²³ David Laskin, *The Long Way Home: An American Journey from Ellis Island to the Great War* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), chapter 3; *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Statistics for North*

Concerns about divided loyalties no doubt prompted *The Literary Digest* study of American attitudes about the war. Issued in November 1914, the survey examined whether Americans were pro-Allied, neutral, or pro-German. Several hundred newspaper editors were asked about their own attitudes and what they believed were the dominant attitudes of their readership might be. There were nearly four hundred replies to the request. The South overwhelmingly favored the Allied or neutral side of the question, with five southern editors indicating that they were pro-German. The only section of the country that came close to a strong pro-German stance was from the Midwest, where many German immigrants had settled in the previous century. Of course, this survey was taken only months after the war began but before the United States had seen any tangible result in terms of lives or material lost.²⁴

On the surface, North Carolinians of German descent had little reason to fear for their safety. Governor Thomas Bickett noted that North Carolinians of German heritage helped to build the state but understood why they might have sympathized with Germany before the United States was technically involved. He was certain, though, that after America declared war, they would fly the American flag first and foremost and assured that public that “99 99/100 percent” of the populace were loyal, although “cranks and lunatics will doubtless appear.” The governor also warned against violence against

Carolina, 591; “Teutonic Populations of the United States,” *Greensboro Daily News*, April 8, 1917; “Plan Industrial Mobilization,” *Farmville Enterprise*, March 2, 1917. I counted Canada, England, France, Holland, Russia, Scotland, and Wales as countries of origin likely favorable to the Allied cause, and Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Ireland as countries of origin likely in favor of the Central Powers’ cause. In the coastal states from Maryland and Virginia down to Florida, an illustrated newspaper map showed 91,141 Americans of Teutonic descent living in this region of the United States by 1917 but did not distinguish citizenship.

²⁴ “American Sympathies in the War,” *Literary Digest*, 49, no. 20 (November 14, 1914): 939-941, 974-978.

German citizens living in North Carolina and asserted that they would be safer in the state than they would have been in Berlin.²⁵

Of course, the reality was different than the rhetoric. Former state Attorney General and mayor of Asheville Theodore Davidson wrote a full-length article in the *Greensboro Daily News* decrying America's potential involvement in the war. He took particular issue with the ambiguity of the nation's supposed neutrality. It seemed to him and many others that the United States had already picked a side before entering the war. Many Tar Heels penned responses to denounce Davidson as an Anglophobe or worse: "He [Davidson] is simply stupid, that's all," wrote one man, though many others offered their support of Davidson's position. Davidson's editorial was motivated in part by growing feelings against German Americans in the state.²⁶

In May of 1917, the League for National Unity was organized in Asheville. The primary objective of the League was to encourage the loyalty of foreign-born citizens to the land of their adoption. Another goal was to ensure fair treatment of those foreign-born people who lived in North Carolina, especially German Americans, so long as they remained loyal. Theodore Davidson spoke at the first meeting to denounce the mistreatment of these North Carolinians. It was reported that Davidson said that "while we were denouncing Germany for militarism we were inaugurating a policy that would make German militarism look like a Sunday school picnic." As much as many politicians

²⁵ R. B. House, ed. *Public Letters and Papers of Thomas Walter Bickett: Governor of North Carolina, 1917-1921*, compiled by Sanford Martin (Raleigh: Edwards Broughton Printing Company State Printers, 1923), "Loyalty of North Carolina," 270.

²⁶ Theodore F. Davidson, "War or Neutrality," *Greensboro Daily News*, March 25, 1917; J. W. Dunn, "An Irishman Replies to Gen. Davidson," *Greensboro Daily News*, March 27, 1917.

around the United States may have been okay with certain discriminatory measures taken against foreign-born Americans, naturalized or not, there were still those, such as Davidson, who were disgusted by those actions and sought to oppose them.²⁷

Dual loyalties have always been a controversial topic in a nation of immigrants such as the United States. Almost every time America enters into a conflict, questions arise about the supposed allegiances of her recent or second-generation immigrants, which had happened most recently during the Mexican American War with people of Mexican heritage living in Texas. It is sometimes called hyphenism but always invokes feelings of distrust. Some Americans, including former president Theodore Roosevelt, insisted that dual loyalties could not work in the United States during wartime. And indeed, there was a great deal of anti-German sentiment felt around the country, both before and after the United States entered the war. Changing the names of foreign-sounding words might seem comical today but such tactics of anti-German expression existed around the country during the Great War. Sauerkraut became liberty cabbage, dachshund dogs became liberty puppies, hamburgers became liberty sandwiches, and most famously frankfurters, became hot dogs. Oddly, many American schools stopped the teaching of German language classes. These issues were worse in northern cities with larger German-stock populations, but they also occurred in North Carolina. One newspaper notice in North Carolina read, “Lovers of the succulent cabbage properly

²⁷ “League for Nation Unity is Organized,” *Greensboro Daily News*, Sunday May 20, 1917.

fermented can now indulge their appetites without suspicion of disloyalty. There is no longer any kraut. Liberty Cabbage takes its place.”²⁸

There may well be some comedy in changing the names of foods and dogs, but the anti-German feelings became prevalent enough that there were some instances of people who had to explain themselves to the public. A newspaper editorial made special mention that a man called Felix Frankfurter was “German in name but [a] good American.” Frankfurter hoped to save his business from a boycott because of his Teutonic surname. In addition to family names, many companies changed their names to more American-sounding ones. Many made changes to reinforce their loyalty to the United States during the war, while many others like Felix Frankfurter felt compelled to take action because they feared a boycott of their products by a distrustful public. Thankfully, there were only a few incidents of anti-German violence in the United States, including the death of one man killed by a mob in Illinois. Most North Carolinians, but not all, recognized that by the 1910s, German Americans were loyal Americans.²⁹

²⁸ Nancy G. Ford, *Issues of War and Peace* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 177-200; Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 177; Kathleen Doane, “Anti-German Hysteria Swept Cincinnati in 1917,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 6, 2012; “Notices,” *Franklin Times*, March 15, 1918; “Notices,” *Roanoke News*, April 4, 1918.

²⁹ Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974); Donald R. Hickey, “The Prager Affair: A Study in Wartime Hysteria,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 62, no.2 (1962): 126-127; Katja Wüstenbecker, “German-Americans during World War I,” *Immigrant Entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies, 1720 to the Present*, 3, ed. Giles R. Hoyt; German Historical Institute, <http://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=214>; “Sauerkraut Disguised so Patriotic Folks Can Eat It,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, April 7, 1918; Gerd Korman, *Industrialization, Immigrants, and Americanizers: The View from Milwaukee, 1866-1921* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967), 292-295.

Recent scholarship has argued that dual loyalties may well have been possible, although not quite in the way one might automatically think. Most North Carolinians of German origin were “industrially compliant and sustained mobilization in both body and purse,” meaning that they were participating in economic activities in support of preparedness efforts. However, a culturally based resistance against complete assimilation took place in North Carolina, especially after the declaration of war. Governor Bickett’s special mention of loyal Germanic North Carolinians came in direct response to discontent from the group in the western part of the state. Many ethnic Germanic people only opposed the same mobilization efforts as many other Tar Heels did, such as through anti-draft petitions, which came from all sectors of North Carolina. There were tensions like these all over the state, but no real sabotage or remarkable riots ever materialized.³⁰

The biggest fear concerning the issues of loyalty did not come from recent immigrants but from black citizens. Longstanding white oppression of African Americans, along with rising black expectations – expressed later on – about a global war for democracy, raised the prospect of disappointment, frustration, and protest from the country’s most visible minority group. Of course, race relations defined the United States ever since the Civil War ended. Even before the United States entered the war, rhetoric from the federal and state governments made it clear that America was interested in protecting democracy at home and abroad. But that idea contradicted the lack of self-

³⁰ Gary R. Freeze, “There May Be a Few Obstructionists About: Mobilization and Resistance in the Germanic Counties of Piedmont North Carolina, 1917-1918” in Shepherd W. McKinley and Steven Sabol, eds., *North Carolina’s Experience during the First World War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018), 109-119.

determination for African Americans who were recently stripped of their rights to vote and participate in American democracy. Many scoffed at what sounded like smug hypocrisy from the president. Southern state lawmakers had steadily been chipping away at black rights since the turn of the century, with several dramatic examples in North Carolina. By 1914, African Americans were barred from purchasing homes on any street that was majority white in Greensboro, North Carolina. Year-by-year until the end of the war, black rights were stripped, so that by 1920 blacks could no longer work alongside whites in offices or factories or live in the same neighborhoods as whites. So, the question of black loyalty was very real to white North Carolinians.³¹

North Carolina before, during, and for decades after the war was part of the solid Democratic South, where almost all whites adhered to the tenets of white supremacy. The reform movements of the progressive period were exclusively for white people. Black Americans were excluded from political life but also segregated from American life in general. A select few “elite” African Americans, including Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois, advocated for various strategies to achieve some degree of equality in American society, but all of these efforts fell short. In the days of slavery nothing scared whites more than the potential for slave rebellions, and in the early twentieth century, nothing scared whites more than the idea of an equal black person.³²

³¹ William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 16-17; Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience during World War I* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), 16.

³² Thomas Aiello, *The Battle for the Souls of Black Folk: W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and the Debate that Shaped the Course of Civil Rights* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2016), xv-xxiv.

Many agencies were set up in the United States by the federal government to work as counterespionage and counter propaganda networks leading up to the Great War. These agencies would have monitored suspected anti-American activities from groups such as any German Americans or other “alien” groups, pacifists, socialists, any group deemed “radical,” and especially African Americans who dared to speak out. In events very similar to what one might expect later in Soviet Russia, individual citizens eagerly supplied tips to the Bureau of Investigation, precursor to the FBI, against African American suspects. Most tips were baseless but arose from widespread suspicion that German agents were actively subverting the loyalty of black Americans.³³

On the eve of the Great War, the economic, social, political, and legal conditions of black Americans was not very different from those during slavery. President Wilson quickly gained notoriety for supporting a white supremacist agenda, leaving black Americans bitterly disappointed. For the most part, their daily lives were characterized by economic exploitation, intimidation, and violence, as it had been for some time. For some African Americans, including W. E. B. DuBois, American involvement in the World War provided a tangible opportunity to prove their loyalty and worth as citizens to white America in the hope that their experience as citizens might improve when the war came to an end.³⁴

White southerners would not be convinced by the actions of black America. Southerners saw any move in the direction of equality, or simply any gathering of

³³ Theodore Kornweibel, *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 1-2.

³⁴ Mjagkij, *Loyalty*, 34-37.

African Americans in an unusual setting, as evidence that German agents were working to influence blacks against the status quo. In one dramatic example, a concerned Franklin County, North Carolina, court official reported that a group of African Americans were reading subversive material. As it turned out, the group was reading a newspaper editorial written by Nick Chiles, who had previously been investigated by the Bureau of Investigation. The editorial criticized blacks who were eager to enlist in the military of a country that offered them no rights. The implication was that “outside interests” were influencing black Americans. The supposed outside influence, Chiles, was an African American citizen from Kansas.³⁵

The most frequent allegations of sedition were that churches and schools with German-speaking populations promoted the subversion. In a bizarre accusation, an allegation arose that German agents working through Catholic and Lutheran schools in North Carolina spread the idea that once Germany occupied the American South, black Americans would be granted absolute equality. Obviously, this allegation was ludicrous, but the fear tactics employed were strong. After all, nothing scared white southerners more than black equality. One possible way to enforce integration would have been a foreign occupation, not unlike the white southern memory of Reconstruction.³⁶

Although German subversion or black integration never materialized in a tangible way, war and apprehension about war sowed many doubts. Time and again leading up to American entry to the war, certain imaginary scenarios were speculated upon around the

³⁵ Theodore Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 2-4 and 40.

³⁶ Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything*, 55.

country, based largely on fear of the possibilities. It was, after all, *possible* that Germany could invade the United States through Mexico and possibly win the war. Ordinary North Carolinians who did not have much contact with the outside world beyond the local newspapers could imagine such scenarios. The actual “German invasion” of North Carolina was far less terrifying. Beginning in the eighteenth century, thousands of people immigrated to North Carolina from elsewhere in America, particularly the Pennsylvania Dutch, as well as from Germany itself. Many of the newcomers came in the great waves of immigrants during the nineteenth century, but virtually none of them ever posed a real threat to American sovereignty. Instead, they prospered as farmers and eventually became ordinary Tar Heels.³⁷

Though most of 1915 the preparedness issue was mentioned almost always in conjunction with the controversial idea that America was actually defenseless. Former president Theodore Roosevelt was the chief blowhorn of this opinion. Other Republicans, such as Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and Representative Augustus Gardiner, both of Massachusetts, and the former Army Chief of Staff Major General Leonard Wood helped lead the push for preparedness and claimed that America’s defenselessness would weaken its ability to help mediate an end to the war, let alone enter it. One of Wilson’s closest advisors, Colonel Edward House, explained to the president that the country needed to be *prepared* to fight in the War to End All Wars as a means to *prevent* that from becoming necessary. Neither the president, nor representatives from the state of

³⁷ Jacqueline B. Painter and Jonathan W. Hortman, *The German Invasion of Western North Carolina: A Pictorial History* (Johnson City, TN: Overmountain Press, 1997); William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 41, 109-111, 125.

North Carolina, ignored the thought of eventual American involvement. Until May 1915, most signs from federal and state leaders indicated that the United States was obviously well aware of potential danger but had no immediate or even long-term intentions of entering the conflict. Wilson assured Congress in his first State of the Union address after the war began that there was no real cause for alarm and the United States was not undefended. This address would have led many North Carolinians to believe that America did not need to enact a drastic or large-scale campaign of preparing for war. And the country remained divided over the question.³⁸

Originally, Colonel House wanted the president to be in a position to mediate an end to the war in Europe. For his part, Wilson sent a personal message to the heads of government in Russia, Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and France. The president felt it was his privilege and duty as the head of one of the signatory states of the Hague Convention “to say to you in a spirit of most earnest friendship that I should welcome an opportunity to act in the interest of European peace, either now or at any other time that might be more suitable.” While many Americans enjoyed the idea that the United States could play peacemaker, the reality was quite different. Most Europeans were not interested in America interfering in this way. And it seemed that until the United States could project its own power, it would have no chance of forcing any peace talks.³⁹

One way that the United States might be able to force talks would be to project enough strength to threaten American intervention against Germany. Another was to

³⁸ Hodgson, *Wilson's Right Hand*, 103-124; Woodrow Wilson, “State of the Union Address,” December 7, 1915.

³⁹ Arthur S. Link, *The Struggle for Neutrality, 1914-1915* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 6-20.

convince the Allies to come to the negotiating table. To that end, House travelled to Europe in early 1915 and attempted to negotiate with both the Allies and the Central Powers but found that the United States was not ready to play the role of world arbitrator. House reasoned that this shortcoming was largely due to America's ill-prepared military. The newspaper headlines declared that there was "no peace in sight" upon his return. House also speculated that it would be problematic if an armistice was achieved before the United States was in a position to settle the peace. After his attempted negotiations in Europe, Colonel House knew that he needed to try harder than ever to convince the president that the United States could only create a lasting peace from a position of power. And power in this case meant a strong military. Later, certain events in the summer of 1916 caused some civilian leaders in Berlin to wonder if Wilson's potential as a mediator should be explored further. But these concerns fell flat in Germany, as the Kaiser was far more influenced by his military than civilian advisors.⁴⁰

Despite the pleas from men like Colonel House, there was no real sense of urgency to act on the idea of American defenselessness, as the United States was not involved yet. The European nations at war left America alone, for the most part. Since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Americans had little to fear from potential European belligerents. As much as the English Channel shielded Great Britain from invasion through most of its history, the Atlantic Ocean proved a fine barrier to prevent any amphibious invasion of the United States. Yet, the progress of technology began to

⁴⁰ Hodgson, *Wilson's Right Hand*, 125-139; "Robert Lansing Succeeds Bryan," *Hertford County Herald*, July 2, 1915; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 165-166.

challenge America's perceived oceanic-induced invincibility. Senator Lodge warned that the aquatic barrier that help to defend America in 1776 and 1812 was destroyed by steam and electricity in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Senator went on to suggest that the United States was "unarmed, unready, undefended" and "stands an invitation to aggression and attack." Arguments such as this one bolstered the pro-preparedness argument.⁴¹

These types of hawkish feelings were prevalent amongst Republicans, and their feelings were a cause for concern throughout the early years of the Great War. The idea of some kind of amphibious invasion on the East Coast of the United States by Germany, Austria-Hungary, or even Italy or the Ottoman Turks seems laughable today. It may have been laughable through the early years of the twentieth century too. But the major fear that German ships or submarines could challenge American invulnerability was very real. There are a few well-known examples of German submarines peaking their periscopes out of the briny deep up and down the coastal regions of the United States in the early years of the war.⁴²

Much of the American public needed to "be sold" on preparedness. Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, launched a campaign in 1915 to undertake this endeavor. The mere threat of submarines in the Atlantic would not justify massive expenditures in the army and navy to the public, but the threat was certainly played as one of the most

⁴¹ Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of America's Entry into World War I* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2011), 72; "Nation Unready for Fight," *Alamance Gleaner*, January 21, 1915.

⁴² Janie R. Knutson, "War is War, and I Must Carry Out My Duty: A Geospatial and Statistical Analysis of North Carolina's First World War Battlescape" (master's thesis, East Carolina University, 2018).

significant threats that the United States ever faced. Daniels, in fact, might be considered a pioneer in public relations techniques that he developed that year. He promoted a plan to improve American naval technology at the same time as he popularized the idea of expanding the navy to the American people.⁴³

North Carolina had cause for concern. Military installations up and down the Atlantic coastline would play a vital role in protecting the United States from the German submarine menace. Some of these installations were considered forts, but not all of them. They did have the collective goal of defending America's coast. Two such installations were in North Carolina: Camp Glenn outside of Morehead City and Fort Caswell on Oak Island. In the end, neither of these forts saw enemy action; they served mostly as refueling stations for ships and airplanes.⁴⁴

Although only seven U-Boats came into American waters during the whole course of the Great War and just three German submarines into those of North Carolina, the Old North State's oceanfront sits at an important shipping route in the Atlantic. The overall role of German submarines was to create an atmosphere of terror, in addition to sinking enemy ships and material. The United States government did try to shut down any talk of them off of America's coastline. The German submarines managed to sink at

⁴³ Theodore A. Thelander, "Josephus Daniels and the Publicity Campaign for Naval and Industrial Preparedness before World War I," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (July 1966): 316-332.

⁴⁴ Emanuel R. Lewis, *Seacoast Fortifications of the United States* (Annapolis: Leeward Publications, 1979), introduction; Jessica Bandel, *North Carolina and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 2017), 58-59.

least ten vessels off of North Carolina's coast alone, so the early fears of those Republicans did exist in at least some form.⁴⁵

Some Americans on the East Coast were so afraid of German U-Boats that they actually blamed the Germans for stirring up shark attacks in coastal waters, such as the famous incidents on New Jersey's coast in the summer of 1916. In an anonymous letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, one American suggested that "the arrival [in American waters] of the German supersubmarine" coincided with the onset of man-eating sharks on Atlantic coastlines, which the author proposed could have meant the shark, or sharks, was originally from European waters. "These sharks may have devoured human bodies" in the German warzone and followed the submarines, "expecting the usual toll of drowning men, women, and children," the author suggested. As silly as this suggestion may seem to modern Americans, the fear of German submarines roaming American waters became very real at various stages of the Great War, even in fantastical situations. Actual German seamen were mere miles off of the American coast! When Senators or Congressmen called for a more active preparedness campaign, they could look to those submarine incidents.⁴⁶

The catalyst for greater preparedness was Germany's sinking of the *RMS Lusitania* on May 7, 1915. On February 9, 1915, the German government announced that unrestricted submarine warfare would resume against armed merchant ships of belligerent nations. That same day, Secretary of State Robert Lansing announced, with

⁴⁵ Knutson, "War is War, and I Must Carry Out My Duty," 82-87. Knutson created charts and maps to indicate the locations and numbers of ships sunk off of North Carolina's coast.

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, July 18, 1916.

Wilson's approval, that the United States did not condemn the German plan as unlawful, but it would be a matter of serious concern if Americans ended up at the bottom of the Atlantic. At that point, the American government refrained from issuing travel restrictions and reserved its own interpretation of whether any ship sinking was lawful. The German threat, illustrated by the sinking of the *Lusitania* and other ships, made several high-ranking government officials believe that war with Germany was only a month away.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, President Wilson assured the American people that there was no major reason for them to fear for their safety at home and reinforced his policy of remaining neutral. He assured the world that the United States would not retaliate against Germany to avenge the lives lost on the *Lusitania*. Instead, the President sent a series of communications to Germany requesting that they cease the destruction of non-belligerent ships. The letters were viewed by some, such as William Jennings Bryan, as fairly aggressive. In fact, Bryan resigned his position as Secretary of State due to the aggression he perceived in the communiques. But these messages did not end up leading to American entry to the war.⁴⁸

By reaffirming American neutrality, the President was able to run his reelection campaign the following year on the platform of having kept the United States out of war. Indeed, the famous slogan from his campaign in 1916 read, "He kept us out of war."

⁴⁷ Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War*, 72; Anthony R. Strickland, "Rural Radical Rampant: The Early Congressional Career of Claude Kitchin" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1976), 66-67.

⁴⁸ Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), Chapter 25; Lee A. Craig, *Josephus Daniels: His Life and Times* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 310-311.

Several anti-war Democrats in the Congress, including Majority Leader Kitchin, insisted that the slogan should have read, “We kept him out of war.” Kitchin and his colleagues communicated regularly with the Wilson Administration to maintain peace. Regardless, Wilson reaffirmed American neutrality while simultaneously continuing to endorse preparedness.⁴⁹

Although Majority Leader Kitchin argued that the United States was already prepared to show its strength, Americans remained divided over the war in 1915. Some believed that direct military intervention was the best method to save Europe from itself. Others reckoned the war was just another European conflict, which needed to be figured out *in* Europe. Whatever the national feeling, Wilson eventually came down on the side of active national preparedness, and a campaign was launched to achieve that goal, which became the major source of disagreement between Kitchin and Wilson. The national stage was set for a lengthy debate on how to prepare the United States for entering the Great War, whether America was already prepared, or if the United States should even consider that possibility. It was obvious to parties on both sides of the debate that the war would touch America in some way and possibly even draw her into conflict. Men like Colonel House believed that the United States could only avoid war by exuding strength and preparing the army and navy for such a possibility. Men such as the Majority Leader believed that the United States was already prepared to show its strength.

⁴⁹ Alex Mathews Arnett, *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1937), 192. The quote “We kept him out of war” was reported to Alex Arnett by Representative J. W. Collier many years after that election. It is possible that it was misremembered, or mishandled, but it does help illustrate the point of Kitchin’s circle. They believed that they helped the president stay out of the war.

The preparedness movement that Kitchin would oppose so strongly originated from the reform spirit of the Progressive Era as another attempt at reformation. Specifically, government officials wanted to “prepare” the American military for the challenges of the twentieth century. Before the World War, however, there was limited success in achieving this goal. A small group of military officers and government officials sympathetic to the military cause saw America’s obsolete army and tried to drag it into the modern world. The questions of preparedness, which began earlier in the century, finally captured the attention of prominent non-military officials after June 1914.⁵⁰

The United States had no tradition of a large, standing army or navy prior to the twentieth century. Twenty-first century America spends more money per year on its military than the next twelve countries combined. However, this spending is only a result of Cold War realities, illuminated in the Powell Doctrine under which the United States should be prepared to fight in two wars anywhere in the world at the same time. The Powell Doctrine was put to the test and proven to be possible in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, with massive commitments of soldiers and money in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the United States has technically never lost a declared war in its history, with only five wars declared by Congress, not including police actions or similar military engagements undertaken by a president with or without congressional approval. Therefore, confusion today about how the United States was ever *not* prepared

⁵⁰ Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon*, 3.

for a war is abundant. The tradition of the Minute Men looms large in America's military lore.⁵¹

The reality of the American military before World War II was that it was quite small compared to European, and other industrialized, contemporaries. One of the major underlying causes of the Great War among European powers was industrialized militarism, which never reached the United States in the same way during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For a time in the nineteenth century, the American military services went into "a period of relative isolation in America as the nation became absorbed in industrialization, the threat of war receded, and the army and navy became intensely involved in professionalizing their functions," according to historian Paul Koistinen. Of course, there were exceptions, such as the gigantic army build up during the Civil War or President Roosevelt's Great White Fleet. So, while the United States might have impressed, or annoyed, its Latin American neighbors with a big naval show (but a navy still lighter than Great Britain's), America still remained behind most Europeans in military manpower, arms, equipment, vehicles, and vessels.⁵²

However, the United States did not necessarily need a large standing army or navy prior to the twentieth century. Virtually all nineteenth century American presidents took President Washington's warning against becoming involved in entangling foreign alliances quite seriously and remained as a spectator to European conflicts of the nineteenth century. Except for the greatest American crisis of the nineteenth century, the

⁵¹ The United States has actually declared war against eleven foreign nations, but several declarations are lumped together under the World War I and World War II headings.

⁵² Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon*, 3; Paul Koistinen, *Mobilizing for Modern War*, 4.

Civil War, the United States avoided having a large military force. Even the Mexican American and Spanish American Wars did not create a very large or long-lasting American army. The former produced a force of about seventy-eight thousand strong, while the latter was described as a “splendid little war” with much emphasis on the “little,” and a similar seventy-two thousand Americans served overseas against Spain. Those forces were only the high points of military strength. Upon the conclusion of both of those wars, the American military shrank considerably.⁵³

One of the most intense debates throughout the preparedness campaign was over what a remodeled army would look like for the United States. One of the first formal announcements to North Carolinians declared the “formation of an organization of first reserves, to be known as the American Legion, which will better insure the nation’s preparedness in case of war,” which appeared in several local newspapers in early March of 1915. A reserve force of up to “300,000 former Army and Navy militiamen [available] for instant call in case of emergency” were included in this preparation. This arrangement, of course, did not require any Tar Heels to volunteer their service for any organized unit, but it represented the very real possibility that the United States could well be on its way to war.⁵⁴

Secretary of War Lindley Garrison suggested to the president that there should be a reorganization of the army into a so-called “continental force,” which would have taken

⁵³ Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1494-2007*, 3rd ed. (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 266-268 and 273-275.

⁵⁴ See “First Reserves to be Ready for War,” *Roanoke Beacon*, March 5, 1915, and “First Reserves to be Ready for War,” *Polk County News*, March 5, 1915, for examples.

the place of the National Guard as the nation's first line of defense against foreign aggression. This Continental Army would be a four-hundred thousand-man guard under the control of the federal government, rather than the state governments, as was the case with the National Guard. In Garrison's proposal, there would be compulsory military training for all American men, not necessarily to serve as an active force, but rather, in reserve. Many high-ranking military and civilian leaders, such as General Hugh Scott, later the Army's Chief of Staff, and former president Theodore Roosevelt advocated for the Continental Army. Other advocates of this or a similar force of men wanted to improve American military effectiveness but also seemed to desire a system of universal military training to help prepare Americans for any war, not just the ongoing world war.⁵⁵

The Continental Army idea not only served the role of preparing the country to defend itself, but it was suggested that it could also act as a homogenizing method to "yank the hyphen" out of recent American immigrants, especially those recent immigrants from Germany. Of course, in North Carolina, there was no real threat of German saboteurs or agents riling up German American Tar Heels, but the fear among other Americans about that very possibility remained very real throughout the war period. Republican Representative George E. Foss of Illinois made a speech on the House floor noting that the "surest and the most democratic way to preparedness is by compulsory military training," which would also serve as a "melting pot" for the nation.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 16-18.

⁵⁶ *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st session, April 5, 1917, 319; Kennedy, *Over Here*, 17-18.

President Wilson at first resisted that idea of creating such a Continental Army. Only after Secretary Garrison resigned did Wilson finally come around to support the idea. Although the Continental Army was actually the brainchild of Garrison, there was a similar recommendation put forth by the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, to increase America's naval capabilities. This reorganization of America's first line of naval defense also gave far more power to the federal government, although there were no state-controlled naval vessels. There were many opponents to the continental army idea, as well as the augmentation of the navy. These opponents argued that it took too much power away from the states, since the Continental Army would supersede the National Guards, which were state driven. The National Guard Association adopted a strong resolution against the formation of a Continental Army at its annual meeting in San Francisco in 1915. The National Guard Association did eventually come around to support the plan but only begrudgingly and with the knowledge that it did not have enough popularity nationwide to be implemented.⁵⁷

The navy, like the army, remained similarly small through most of the nineteenth century. There were, however, certain incidents in which the navy projected a huge amount of power. Commodore Stephen Decatur's destruction of the Barbary pirates and Commodore Matthew Perry's "opening of Japan" were a few such incidents. By the early twentieth century, Roosevelt's Great White Fleet circumnavigated the world. It consisted of sixteen battleships and many escort vessels. With some additions and subtractions to

⁵⁷ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 17-18; George Herring Jr., "James Hay and the Preparedness Controversy, 1915-1916, *Journal of Southern History* 30, no. 4 (November 1964): 392; Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War*, 189.

this number, these were the ships that participated in the American troubles with Mexico, and later, represented American naval capacity at the entry to the Great War. While the American navy grew larger, it still trailed behind Britain, in terms of naval capacity for war.⁵⁸

Ex-President Roosevelt and General Leonard Wood, who both cut their military teeth during the war with Spain, along with preparedness organizations such as the National Security League (NSL) and the Military Training Camps Association (or Plattsburgers) advocated for a complete reorganization of the traditional military format. Many of them rejected the old formula of organizing the American military by filling it with volunteers and militias as “anachronistic remnants of a parochialism obstructive to national efficiency.” The twentieth century demanded a professional army from industrialized nations and these Americans wanted to comply with that demand. In other words, they wanted to prepare the United States for war, whether or not war would become necessary.⁵⁹

War preparedness meant different things to different Americans in the early twentieth century. On the one hand, many claimed that preparedness simply meant America’s ability to defend itself. On the other hand, people argued that preparation led to jingoism. The ability to go to war remained the most common method of measurement, and it was most often measured by the amount of overall military spending by the government. Another test of preparedness came from comparisons made between the

⁵⁸ Jack Sweetman, *American Naval History: An Illustrated Chronology of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, 1775-Present* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 109-128.

⁵⁹ William J. Breen, *Uncle Sam at Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism, and the Council of National Defense, 1917-1919* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), 75.

United States' military and the militaries of other major world powers, especially Great Britain and Germany. The amount of able-bodied American men available to serve in the military was counted towards the nation's level of preparedness. Simply put, whatever America needed in order to be able to go to war was what measured its preparedness. "Preparedness is militarism" suggested Oswald Villard, the outspoken anti-militarist. Two sides of the United States emerged as the Great War became larger and encompassed more of the world. Pro- and anti- preparedness organizations appeared around the country to argue in favor or against the movement.⁶⁰

No event in 1914 proved to be a serious motivator to get the United States ready for war. The first impact of the war on the American people was economic. Trade between the United States and those European nations at war decreased but was not nearly significant enough to cause a declaration of war. By mid-1915 the pressure on President Wilson to begin preparation ramped up. The German policy of unrestricted submarine warfare caused him to reevaluate American's policy of neutrality, and despite his famous campaign slogan, "He Kept Us Out of War," the president had been working toward preparing the nation through 1915. That year, the president sent letters to the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy to discuss the possibilities of a military preparedness movement that would lead to greater national defense. This news reached America's most outspoken opponent of the preparedness movement a few days later, and Claude Kitchin readied his response.

⁶⁰ Oswald Garrison Villard, "Preparedness is Militarism," *New York Evening Post*, July 1, 1916.

In an interview with the *New York World*, a Democratic-leaning paper, Kitchin reinforced his belief several times that the United States did need an adequate military for defense, but not for offense. He favored submarines, destroyers, and other small coastal defense ships rather than gigantic battleships, which could be seen as aggressive or offensive weapons. Kitchin believed that aggressive preparedness, such as the call for building battleships in the president's program, whether reasonable or not, amounted to nothing more than preparation for an offensive war. The Majority Leader confided in his close allies, men such as Senator James Vardaman, that he was enthusiastic that seven-eighths of House Democrats opposed the American preparedness campaigns, but Kitchin expected that they would eventually vote in favor of war when the time came.⁶¹

The president did not share Kitchin's view on the number of Democrats who opposed preparedness. Indeed, practically all major House Democrats had pledged their support to the Wilson administration's preparedness policy by late 1915, proving Kitchin wrong. But Wilson did want Kitchin's support, and to that end, the president invited the Majority Leader to meet with him. Wilson appealed to Kitchin's patriotism and party loyalty in an effort to have him lead the administration's policy. Other party leaders were willing to compromise on several issues and the president hoped that Kitchin might also do the same. When the meeting finally came on November 8, Kitchin made his opposition to those plans clear to President Wilson. He spent more than an hour with the President, who outlined the army and naval proposals for the next Congress and for his

⁶¹ "Claude Kitchin," *New York World*, September 12, 1915; Ingle, "Pilgrimage," 102; Kitchin to James K. Vardaman, October 27, 1915, Box 4, Kitchin Papers.

five-year plan. The newspapers described this meeting as “amicable throughout,” but Kitchin maintained his opposition, conceding that most of his fellow Democratic representatives were on the same side as the President.⁶²

One Democrat who did not agree with the president was William Jennings Bryan. He sided with Kitchin on many matters, and the notion that America was already prepared for defense was particularly evident to both. “We have a potential power of defense such as no other nation has today – such as no other nation has ever had, and other nations know it,” wrote Bryan. One of the original ideas of preparedness set forth by Colonel House reckoned that the United States could only avoid a war from the stance of power, in the form of a well-prepared army and navy. Bryan and Kitchin were frustrated that they had to keep reminding the country that it was *already* prepared to defend itself, so these increased expenses and military build-ups were unnecessary.⁶³

To meet the president’s increasing support of preparedness, and to respond openly and in public to Wilson, in November 1915, Kitchin co-authored an anti-preparedness pamphlet, developed from separate speeches, with Bryan. The pamphlet was well received by much of the public, and many copies were requested from around the state of North Carolina in particular. *Peace or War: What the Preparedness Program Means* delivered Bryan and Kitchin’s thoughts on the preparedness program to the country. Bryan, in his part took his time to explain how destructive the war already had been for Europe, for both belligerent and neutral nations; how the war had no good cause, and

⁶² Herring, “James Hay,” 391; Strickland, “Rural Radical Rampant,” 75; “Increase Army Fund,” *Washington Daily News*, October 16, 1915.

⁶³ William Jennings Bryan and Claude Kitchin, *Peace or War: What the Preparedness Program Means* (Wilmington, DE: Collections Department, Hagley Museum and Library, 1915), 16.

how it was an anti-Christian war. He pointed out how America had already tried to play the mediator, but the European combatants all played the blame game instead. They all pointed their fingers at the other major powers as the true culprits behind the “great crime of the century.” When Bryan addressed preparedness, he explained that getting the country ready for a war would ultimately lead to one, rather than prevent it as had been suggested by Colonel House.⁶⁴

Kitchin’s portion of the pamphlet laid out the facts, as he recognized them, and reassured the nation that the United States was already prepared. “WE ARE PREPARED,” he consistently reiterated to the newspapers. A follow-up speech by the Majority Leader led to more requests for copies of his writings and speeches. “We are getting quite a lot of requests for your speech that you made the other day,” noted a secretary. Requests for additional information on his anti-preparedness activities, ideas, speeches, and writings arrived at his office regularly throughout his terms in Congress, and he was usually happy to respond. At least one time, Kitchin’s office had to request twenty-five thousand copies of one of his speeches to satisfy the demands of his constituents.⁶⁵

Kitchin certainly received a fair share of disagreeing correspondence in response to the speech and pamphlet. “The vast majority of our people are with the President in his determination to uphold the rights of our citizen[s], we call upon you to stand by him,” wrote one man. A community of North Carolinians “now residing in Baltimore” sent

⁶⁴ Bryan and Kitchin, *Peace or War*, 4, 5, 9, 11, 13, and 14.

⁶⁵ S. E. High to Kitchin, December 20, 1915, Box 6, Kitchin Papers; Receipt from the Public Printer from Claude Kitchin’s office, April 11, 1917, Box 19, Kitchin Papers.

telegrams to his D.C. office with their thoughts about preparedness. This community followed Kitchin's past record in Congress "with pride and pleasure" but noted that Kitchin's "present attitude of opposition to President Wilson" was deplorable. It seemed to be a question of honor to these "loyal Tarheels," and they did not feel adequately represented from their state of origin. Another former North Carolinian living in Maryland begged Kitchin to "support the President in arm[ing] merchantmen and [in] other diplomatic controversies," while imploring him to "remember [the] honorable traditions of [the] people you represent" and reminding him not to defame the Old North State.⁶⁶

The American people were obviously divided on the issue of war preparedness, but the North Carolinians who opposed American involvement in the war were quick to reassure the Majority Leader that he was on the proper course. He often replied to letters of support sent to his office with a similar response, "I am sure if the people knew the real facts, not one disinterested person in fifty would favor [preparedness], but would oppose it as earnestly as I shall. I shall fight it to the end." The representative never minced his words. He was as interested in thanking those who supported his stance as he was interested in asking those who opposed him to explain their reasoning. He believed what he said and thought, and he believed if those who supported the preparedness programs saw the situation as he did, then they might change their opinion on the matter.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ O.M. Stafford to Kitchin, February 25, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers; Telegram, Oscar D. Green to Kitchin, March 6, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers; Telegram, Haywood Guion Dewey to Kitchin, March 6, 1916, Box 6, Kitchin Papers.

⁶⁷ Kitchin to Mr. J. F. Rhodes, January 6, 1916, Box 7, Kitchin Papers.

Kitchin rarely expected anyone to just “take his word for it” and was usually willing to explain his position to anyone who questioned it. He would ask constituents that wrote to him why they supported more preparedness measures after he displayed the figures which supported his position: that the country was already prepared. Some constituents imagined grave danger, such as with the threat of a German invasion of America. Many people held a favorable position for preparedness because they lived in fear of that threat. The Majority Leader usually tried to reassure those fears. “We differ on the so-called preparedness question [and] I must say that I do not anticipate the dangers which you prophecy (sic),” Kitchin answered in response to a constituent’s prediction of a German invasion by 1918. He continued that he was for a “reasonable preparedness,” which the country already had.⁶⁸

Kitchin was rarely condescending and wanted to be sure that the American people were well-informed before they started making assumptions. He usually opened response letters with a request to make sure the recipient understood “the facts” as he knew them. Kitchin often began his letters of response with a request, “Please be kind enough to write to me by return mail what you understand is the President’s program of preparedness. . . Please write me also what you understand is my position. What I favor and what I oppose,” he asked one man. Kitchin honestly believed that if the people understood the facts as he knew them, they would agree with his stance. The end of these letters was also

⁶⁸ Kitchin to T. L. Moffett, February 19, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers.

uniform, “I am inclined to believe that if we both knew the facts and understood the President’s program. . . there would be very little difference between us.”⁶⁹

Kitchin received letters and correspondence from across the country, not just from North Carolina, in support of his opposition to the President’s preparedness programs. “I just want to add my voice to the thousands of those who are offering you their heartfelt congratulations on the particularly brave stand you have taken relative to preparedness” one Marylander wrote. By late 1915, war was on the minds of everyone in and out of Europe, and this resident of the Old Line State echoed what many people from across the country thought. Importantly, modern Americans need to keep in mind that despite news of the war headlining every newspaper across the United States, there was still no inevitability of American entry. Today, we sometimes understand America’s role in the World War as though American involvement was a foregone conclusion, while in 1915, it was reasonable for Americans to question the merits of entering the European war.⁷⁰

Through most of 1915 and 1916, Kitchin received the occasional telegram or letter expressing disappointment or asking him to change his view on preparedness, and the days or week following a big speech or publication by Kitchin led to an influx of these letters and telegrams. However, he received far more correspondence in the way of support. The community of Tar Heels who were living in Baltimore, for instance, produced more support than opposition. There were many meetings held by this tight-knit group. “The telegram sent you yesterday by several North Carolinians represents their

⁶⁹ Kitchin to T. L. Moffett, February 19, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers.

⁷⁰ Edward C. Nelson to Kitchin, November 19, 1915, Box 4, Kitchin Papers.

personal view, but not the views of all North Carolinians in [Baltimore],” wrote Richard White, one of those transplanted to Maryland. White continued, “On behalf of myself and several others, I wish to commend your course which has our fullest backing.” White ended by sharing his admiration of Kitchin’s “pluck.” Presumably, these two opposing factions of Tar Heels in the Old Line State knew each other and held meetings to discuss their planned response to Kitchin’s speech and pamphlet.⁷¹

On the other side of the preparedness issue, a semi-famous American inventor and critic of America’s lack of preparedness, Hudson Maxim, penned a lengthy essay in response to Kitchin’s beliefs and public speeches. The reply began with a seemingly personal attack that accused Kitchin of being a buffoon: “I have not the least doubt but that Mr. Kitchin is possessed of sufficient unwisdom to believe what he says, for all the remarks that he has ever made upon preparedness are to my mind unimpeachable evidence that he is sufficiently ignorant of the subject.” For all of the bluster and hyperbole of Maxim’s essay, the inventor did make a few lucid points that most definitely resonated with many North Carolinians. In an analogy, Maxim compared Kitchin’s stance to an animal standing on a railroad track. Despite warnings from multiple sources, the bull on the railroad (and Kitchin in this analogy) decided to lock horns and opposed a force which they could not conquer.⁷²

Another, more reasonable, challenge to Kitchin’s essay from Maxim was that the United States should not be satisfied with Great Britain’s strong navy to protect against

⁷¹ Richard J. White to Kitchin, March 7, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers.

⁷² Hudson Maxim, “Mr. Kitchin’s Colossal Folly,” *Issues & Events* 4, no. 3 (January 15, 1916): 35.

German aggression, and Americans should consider what would come once the war ended. One of Kitchin's major points was that the British navy was considerably large enough to defend the Atlantic, and when America conducted an inventory of its own naval strength, only Britain's was larger. "I do not believe that the United States of America would be safe under the towering preponderance of the British navy after the European War is over," wrote Maxim.⁷³

Beyond the argument that the United States was already prepared to face an international crisis, Kitchin's constituents steeled his opposition to preparedness. Especially when they warned against America surrendering its position of moral authority as one of the few great world powers that was not engaged in "the great crime of the century." Entering the war, or simply advocating an aggressive preparedness movement, would cause the United States "to lose caste and position in the world of men and women," wrote a supporter to Kitchin. America "would be throwing her great opportunity to the winds, and bringing herself unending promise of trouble if this action [preparedness] is taken," the supporter concluded. Another constituent suggested to Kitchin that "it seems impossible to understand how men who know history as well as some of the advocates of preparedness do, can possibly see logic or common sense in this movement." The writer seemed to be suggesting that President Wilson, as a man who knew history, was a historian earlier in his career, should have known better and chosen a different course of action to deal with the international crisis.⁷⁴

⁷³ Claude Kitchin, "Why I am Opposed to Preparedness," *Issues & Events* 3, no. 23 (December 4, 1915): 3-4; Maxim, "Mr. Kitchin's Colossal Folly," 35-36.

⁷⁴ Edward C. Nelson to Kitchin, November 19, 1915, Box 4, Kitchin Papers.

One of the stories retold in elementary school classrooms around the United States today reinforces the idea of American moral authority. Teachers explain that one of the major reasons that British colonists came to the Americas was to escape the supposed immorality of Europe. And as one of Kitchin's constituents, Edward Nelson, suggested to Kitchin in a 1915 letter, those stories carried weight well into the twentieth century, albeit in a marginally different context. It is as obvious today as it was over a century ago that the Great War was an abominable cataclysm for humanity, especially after the catastrophic Battle of the Somme River and the Battle of Verdun in 1916, which produced casualties nearing two million men. The Western world had not seen such destruction for over a century, since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Except for the Civil War, the United States only had experience with limited wars that were expected to be brief and successful. In Europe, the same was mostly true, as limited wars ruled the continent after 1815.⁷⁵

With the World War in full swing and the casualty tolls in the millions, Americans may have been right to claim the moral high ground between 1914 and 1917. After all, American newspapers displayed images of the carnage that Europeans were suffering from and reported devastation-level casualty numbers from French, British, German, Russian, and other European nations, while America had yet to lose any lives on the battlefield. And while there were certainly Americans injured and killed because of the war, such as during the sinking of the *Lusitania*, there was no blame on the United

⁷⁵ Edward C. Nelson to Kitchin, November 19, 1915, Box 4, Kitchin Papers; Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 184-195.

States for those casualties. Those Americans happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and died unfortunately, but America remained blameless, and therefore, morally superior to Europe.⁷⁶

Claude Kitchin's opposition to the American preparedness campaigns cannot be dismissed by claiming that he was simply against the munitions makers and industries in the United States who stood to profit from American intervention in the war, although he did believe that the only Americans who would profit were the munitions industry and bankers. Rather, Kitchin concluded that preparedness indicated something more than just national defense, as the claim had been made in many circles. The buildup of a peacetime army and navy meant that the United States had offense on the mind, just like the nation did during its war with Spain two decades prior. And whatever the Great War's final outcome was, this preparedness movement may have led to another arms race after its conclusion in Kitchin's mind, which increased the likelihood of more and larger wars to come in the future. The United States, Kitchin felt, had a duty to lead by example for the rest of the world. He believed that "the militarists and war traffickers of every nation in the world will point to our conduct as an example" after the World War was over to continue an arms race in the name of preparedness and self-defense. If America joined the war, it would lose claim to the moral high ground it occupied in the early twentieth century.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ While the United States had lost no soldiers to the war by 1917, there were groups of volunteers who flew airplane missions and did some fighting for European powers, but they did not fight under the American flag.

⁷⁷ Kitchin, "Why I am Opposed to Preparedness," 5.

In the end, the preparedness campaigns which Claude Kitchin so ardently fought against were implemented to one degree or another but did not get the United States ready to go to war in April 1917. Indeed, it took nearly a year after the American declaration of war before the country entered the conflict in any tangible way. General Blackjack Pershing commented years later that Wilson did not even understand what would be necessary to prepare to go to war. Historian John Finnegan has suggested that the preparedness campaigns were never actually designed to get America ready for war but were almost purely defensive in strategy. The movement was billed as isolationist, rather than interventionist, despite the personal attitudes of its loudest proponents. “In a collapsing world, America was arming against nameless dangers which would follow the end of the European War,” Finnegan concluded. Despite the confusing goals, trajectory, and eventual outcome of the preparedness campaign, it gripped the American consciousness, political debates, and the conversations of North Carolinians.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, volume 1 (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), 8-9; Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon*, 4.

CHAPTER IV
**NORTH CAROLINA, THE SECOND-BEST NAVY, AND THE TEST OF
PREPAREDNESS, 1916**

Please write me by return mail what is your understanding of my position with respect to the so-called "preparedness program," and what do you think I favor? Also write me specifically what is your understanding of the President's Military program, of what it consists; and of what does his naval program consists. From your letter, you evidently do not understand my position

--Claude Kitchin to W. H. Nash

By late 1916 and into 1917 the United States was inching closer to war whether Americans wanted to or not. The debate over preparedness revealed to many Americans that there were potential areas of vulnerability. American preparedness was tested on two fronts. Neutrality was especially at risk in the North Atlantic and, closer to home, across the southern border with Mexico. The German submarine menace posed significant threats to American shipping, and in several high-stakes incidents, led the country closer to war. But many would argue that an even more threatening attack loomed just to the south. Mexico suffered through a period of high instability, and in 1916-1917, the United States' sovereignty was violated along the southern border.

From 1914 to 1917, American neutrality underwent its most severe threat from a European power since the United States signed the Treaty of Ghent one century previous. Through the course of the preparedness debate, President Wilson decided to agree with his advisor, Colonel House. The best way to maintain neutrality, the president believed, was through a well-prepared army and navy. The Navy League agreed and suggested that

“battleships are cheaper than battles,” later adding that “the weight of a powerful navy gives force to diplomacy.” In 1915, after a German submarine sank the *Lusitania*, Wilson sent word to Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels to get the “best minds in the Department to work on the subject” and develop a plan of action to respond to any threat to American neutrality.¹

Daniels has been described as the “most powerful man in North Carolina” by one of his recent biographers. Other historians note that he was “perhaps one of the most influential North Carolinians” during the Great War, next to Claude Kitchin. State governors came and went, but Daniels remained in a position of power from both his cabinet office and his printing press. Daniels was a native Tar Heel and ran the powerful, Raleigh-based *News and Observer* for most of his adult life. The paper would play an instrumental role in helping to shape public opinions on matters important to Daniels. While northern cities were satiated by William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, North Carolinians turned to Daniels for their news and helped turn him into a wealthy man.²

In part, Daniels used his wealth to become more involved in politics. Through the late nineteenth century, he was involved with the local Democratic party. It was after his purchase of the *News and Observer*, and later involvement with the white supremacy

¹ Woodrow Wilson to Josephus Daniels, May 21, 1915 in Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 33, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 151; Stephen Howarth, *To Shining Sea: A History of the United States Navy, 1775-1998* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 301-302.

² Lee A. Craig, *Josephus Daniels: His Life and Times* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), ix-x; Jessica Bandel, *North Carolina and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History: 2017), 46-57.

campaigns in 1898 and 1900, that he became heavily involved in politics. He supported Wilson in 1912, which led to his appointment as Secretary of the Navy. As the United States drew closer to war, Daniels became a close confidant of Wilson. He supported the president's neutrality policy but recognized that after Germany and Britain escalated their naval war the United States would face great difficulty maintaining neutrality. No one ever held the cabinet position longer than Daniels did and when the United States finally entered the Great War, he became one of the most important men in the world. Claude Kitchin had been a longtime political ally to Daniels. Some friction developed between the two based on a feud that emerged after the 1908 North Carolina gubernatorial election in which Daniels supported William Walton Kitchin's opponent.³

Daniels may not have been the best choice to head such an important post on the eve of entering a war. He lacked any experience with the navy and was not very popular with long-time naval officers, but he did learn fast. One of his most memorable acts as secretary, and maybe the largest contribution to his unpopularity, was a ban on alcohol on all navy ships. More than alcohol, though, Daniels did not like war. He hated even talking about the notion of war. Years after the Great War ended, a naval admiral noted that Daniels rarely ever used the term "war" or "preparedness for war." Nevertheless, after the president's request to "put the best minds in the Department to work" Daniels did just that and quickly earned the trust of career officers. Men such as Thomas Edison were put to work after the formation of a consulting board that included some of the country's

³ Craig, *Daniels*, 209.

most influential and smartest scientists and engineers. The board researched and developed ideas on matters that involved submarine technology and ship construction.⁴

Naval warfare underwent large changes in the years leading up to the Great War. In the three centuries preceding the twentieth, scores of rules developed among the European naval powers regarding the conduct of the capture or sinking of unarmed merchant ships. Warships were fair game for all of these nations. Belligerent powers retained the right to stop any ship flying an enemy flag and search it for materials that might support the enemy's war effort, or "contraband." If any contraband were found, the ship was to be escorted to the nearest port and a so called "prize court" would make the determination on whether the items or material were technically contraband and needed to be confiscated. If it was not possible to seize contraband, the vessel was allowed to be destroyed but only once the crew and passengers had the opportunity to reach a place of safety with lifeboats, transfer to the opposing ship, or otherwise.⁵

The foundations of the American Republic rested on its ability to freely travel and trade across oceans, especially the North Atlantic, with the major economic powers in Europe. Control of America's coastal waters played the most essential role for victory in the War for Independence (with French help), Mexican American, Civil, and Spanish American Wars. Lack of control on the Atlantic led to the War of 1812. And the German submarine menace in the North Atlantic between 1915 and 1917 became the single

⁴ Theodore A. Thelander, "Josephus Daniels and the Publicity Campaign for Naval and Industrial Preparedness before World War I," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (July 1966): 316-332; Craig, *Daniels*, 294-295, 302-303; Bandel, *North Carolina*, 56-57.

⁵ Michael Howard, *The First World War: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 72-76.

biggest reason for American involvement in the Great War. This American desire for “freedom of the seas” would later be reflected in President Wilson’s Fourteen Points as second in importance only to the abolition of future secret alliances. From the American perspective of the war, “closed” seas were one of the major factors that led to the start of the war.⁶

Between June 12 and June 15, 1775, the United States Navy was born. It was officially established in October of that year. The American Navy was not particularly noteworthy or even remarkable in its first century, apart from certain undertakings scattered throughout the nineteenth century. The Navy had participated in at least eight large-scale actions before the United States entered the Great War. Naval officers gained experience with blockades, patrols, and steam engines. But the Navy lacked in “fleet experience,” although some gains were made in the war against Spain. As far back as the American Civil War, the Navy experimented with submarine ships but never on a large scale. But there was a lack of tangible experience with the submerged ships.⁷

A submarine is obviously much different than a surface ship. The very definition of a submarine establishes its location as below the water. The early days of submarine technology determined that the vessel would be a small one with barely enough room for the crew and equipment necessary to operate the boat. For this reason, German submarines could not possibly adhere to the longstanding rules of the high seas. They did not have the space to transfer a crew, nor did they have the luxury of surfacing to

⁶ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look at His Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 103.

⁷ Howarth, *Naval History*, 1, 215, 271-304.

challenge the surface ship without fear of being fired on. The *Lusitania* was not the first ship to be sunk under these new realities of war and it would not be the last, but it remains today as one of the most prominent in American minds because it was the first major loss of American lives associated with the war.⁸

The British practice of arming merchant ships and the German announcement of sinking armed merchant ships would eventually be the leading reasons that drew the United States into the war. President Wilson and Secretary of State Robert Lansing recognized the absurdity that would have been required to follow the old rules of naval warfare, requiring a submarine to surface and warn the merchant ship, which was armed well enough to sink the submarine. The British government argued that their merchant ships had a right to defend themselves and it was not sure that disarming the merchants would prevent the Germans from sinking the ships anyway.⁹

The German government could reasonably justify the sinking of the *Lusitania* due to the new realities of war. While he was still a counselor to the Department of State, Lansing wrote a memorandum, which was later shared with President Wilson, that preemptively addressed many possible justifications that the German government could use. First, Lansing explained that the *Lusitania* supposedly carried munitions of war (contraband) for Great Britain. Lansing suggested that unless that information was communicated to the German submarine, there was no way for them to even know it. Second, the Germans claimed that the ship had guns on board for self-defense against any

⁸ Howard, *First World War*, 72-73.

⁹ Link, *Wilson*, 1-7.

German ships, but Lansing noted that none were actually mounted on deck, or elsewhere visible to the Germans. Third, the German government continually took out newspaper advertisements in American papers announcing their intentions and therefore was prepared to sink any British ship. Lansing concluded that the German government and its embassy in Washington D.C. went over the heads of the American government, took advantage of America's free press, and insulted the Wilson administration by warning the American people rather than the American government.¹⁰

Of the nearly 1,200 lives lost in the sinking, 128 were Americans. At least one North Carolinian was on the ship, Dr. Owen Kenan of Wilmington. On the day prior to the ship's destruction, only a few North Carolinians may have noticed the *Lusitania* mentioned in the papers. In general, fear of travelling on the open ocean probably did not concern many Tar Heels, as there were notes sprinkled in newspapers attesting to the general inefficacy of submarines as weapons of war. "Torpedoes cost over \$5,000 each," began one article in the *Polk County News*, due to the expense "they are not discharged unless there is a fair chance of hitting the object aimed at," it continued. This article appeared the day that the *Lusitania* was destroyed and assured North Carolinians that submariners may get better at hitting ships in the future, but for the time being, they were just too expensive to be a major concern. There seemed to be no danger for merchant ships, as the old rules for the high seas governing a sinking were still in effect as far as any Americans knew.¹¹

¹⁰ William Jennings Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, May 10, 1915, and Memorandum enclosure from Robert Lansing from May 10, 1915, in Link, ed., *Papers of Wilson*, Vol. 33, 142-143.

¹¹ "Work of Torpedoes," *The Polk County News*, May 7, 1915; Passenger list information from <http://www.rmslusitania.info/lusitania-passenger-list/>.

The ill-fated *Lusitania* had been mentioned in North Carolinian newspapers fewer than ten times across the state in the months leading up to the event of its sinking.¹² The famous warnings taken out by Ambassador Count von Bernstorff were prominent in newspapers in Washington D.C. and New York City. For instance, the following was plastered on the front page of the *Washington Times* on May 1: “NOTICE! Travelers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany [and] Great Britain . . . In accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain . . . are liable to destruction.” Americans were reminded that “travelers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.” This warning was posted in about fifty national newspapers throughout much of the eastern United States, especially in Washington D.C. and New York City.¹³

The warning advertisements made their way to the Old North State too. Buried in the middle of the “General News” section in an Asheboro paper were two short blurbs. One noted that the German embassy had taken out advertisements in other papers advising Americans not to board the ship, and the other blurb stated that anonymously signed telegrams were sent to potential passengers advising them that the “liner was to be sunk.” At least one recipient tore up the telegram without comment. Presumably, the man disregarded the warning as just another instance of the German warnings which were

¹² This number is based on a digital search of North Carolina newspapers at digitalnc.org. It is possible that the ship could have been mentioned in non-digitized papers unknown to the author.

¹³ Advertisement taken by Count Von Bernstorff, *The Washington Times*, May 1, 1915; John Protasio, *The Day the World Was Shocked: The Lusitania Disaster and its Influence on the Course of World War I* (Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2011), 213.

becoming commonplace and littered throughout newspapers nationwide. One well-known North Carolina native and doctor did have a ticket for the ship. Presumably, no one would have noticed had the ship not sunk.¹⁴

The well-known North Carolina native and doctor, Owen Hill Kenan, managed to survive the sinking and, in doing so, to remind Tar Heels of the realities of war. Kenan was born to James and Annie Kenan in a plantation house in Duplin County, North Carolina, in 1872. He was the grandson of a U.S. Senator and great-great grandson of General James Kenan of the American Revolution. Kenan attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Horner's Military Academy in Oxford, North Carolina. He became well-known as an Ambulance Corps volunteer in France during the war and received the title (not rank) of Colonel and a *Croix de Guerre* for his service. Later he volunteered for the American Expeditionary Forces Medical Corps. On board the *Lusitania* on May 7, Kenan stood with millionaire socialite Alfred Vanderbilt and Vanderbilt's valet while the ship was going down. Vanderbilt died trying to save other passengers, while Kenan was able to survive the sinking. While Kenan's experience aboard the ship was unique among Tar Heels, the incident hit close to the heart of many North Carolinians.¹⁵

Soon after May 7, papers were filled with messages about the ship. "America is suddenly brought into the maelstrom of this gigantic war by the torpedoing and sinking of the *Lusitania*," noted one local column. "What will our government do about it?" the

¹⁴ "General News," *The Asheboro Courier*, May 6, 1915; "Wilmington Man on *Lusitania*," *Washington Daily News*, May 8, 1915.

¹⁵ Thomas S. Kenan III, "Kenan, Owen Hill," in William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: Volume 3 H-K* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 345.

author demanded. He also asked if Americans should just stay at home while the war raged on? Many in the state echoed these questions. “We have a right to expect some quick action on this foul deed of enormous barbarity” the columnist closed. The *Twice-A-Week Dispatch* identified itself as a Republican leaning paper and therefore a slightly more hawkish one. But this author’s feelings carried across the state. Many asked what the government planned to do about the event and felt it should not be left unchallenged.¹⁶

In response to the sinking, the American and Imperial German governments entered into agonizing negotiations, which eventually led Wilson to reexamine his opposition to American preparedness efforts. It was not until the following year and the sinking of the French liner *Sussex* on March 24, 1916, that Wilson finally obtained a pledge from Germany to return to the traditional search and seizure rules of naval war. With the *Sussex Pledge*, Germany vowed to discontinue targeting passenger ships, to not sink merchants until the presence of weapons onboard was established, and to discontinue sinking ships without making adequate provisions for the safety of the crew and passengers. That pledge from the German government, ultimately, did not amount to much. Less than a year later, Germany renewed its policy of unrestricted naval warfare in early February of 1917.¹⁷

The dramatic sinking of the *Lusitania* did not, in the end, immediately lead to America’s entry to the Great War, as many believe today. The end result did free the

¹⁶ “The Sinking of the *Lusitania*,” *Twice-A-Week Dispatch*, May 11, 1915.

¹⁷ Robert H. Zieger, *America’s Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 43-49.

United States to focus more on preparedness than it was able to do previously. However, President Wilson concluded that America's military weakness hindered the diplomatic exchanges between herself and the German government. Thereafter, Wilson ordered the War and Navy Departments to begin preparations on an "adequate national defense" program due to be submitted to Congress by December, a move that historian Arthur Link described as "the most important decision on domestic policy that Wilson made during the year 1915."¹⁸

Despite the controversy concerning which flag the *Lusitania* may have displayed on the day of its watery demise, ships such as the *Housatonic*, *City of Memphis*, *Illinois*, and *Vigilancia* were without doubt American ships, flying the Stars and Stripes, and were sunk by German submarines in early 1917. In all, ten American merchants were sunk between February and early April, with the loss of many Americans lives. This third, and ultimately final, campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare that began in February that year proved too much to bear for the American Congress and President Wilson. Many of the congressmen and senators who spoke before the war vote cited these sinkings to accuse Germany of waging a ruthless war without mercy.¹⁹

The *Housatonic* (distinct from the Civil War-era American vessel of the same name) was an American ship, but no American lives were lost when it was sunk. The German Captain in this sinking's case followed traditional, or honorable, methods.

¹⁸ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality, 1914-1915* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 370-377 and 591.

¹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 310, 334, 392, and 395; Rodney Carlisle, *Sovereignty at Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry into World War I* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2011), 13.

Warning shots were fired, and despite protests from the *Housatonic*'s captain, the crew were ordered onto lifeboats before the final torpedo struck. The crew were towed in their lifeboats for roughly an hour and a half by the German submarine after the sinking. The other three ships mentioned carried dozens of American citizens on them when they were sent to the depths. The sinking of these ships played a crucial role in Wilson's, and the American public's, decision to finally enter the war against Germany. In initial reports from the *New York Times*, however, the *Housatonic* incident alone was not enough to cause war. But the sinking of additional American ships did signal Germany's renunciation of the *Sussex Pledge*, in which the German government agreed to restrict the sinking of merchant ships.²⁰

From Friday, March 16, to Sunday March 18, 1917, three American merchant ships were sunk and proved to be the so-called "tipping point" sinkings. The *Vigilancia* went down on the 16th, next it was the *City of Memphis* on the 17th, and finally, the *Illinois* on the 18th. These were not the first American ships to be sunk, and their downfalls did not result in the most losses of life either. About one hundred fewer sailors and merchants died from the incidents on this weekend than the sinking of the *Lusitania*. However, their individual stories were determined to be the tipping point. Oftentimes, ships would be constructed in one country and sold to another, possibly financed by investors in a third country, but this situation did not apply to *Vigilancia*. The *Vigilancia* was well marked with its name and large American flags painted on both sides and with an illuminated American flag flying over it. It had never been anything but an American

²⁰ "U-boat captain gave Housatonic an hour's warning before sinking," *New York Times*, February 5, 1917.

ship. The *Vigilancia* was the first American vessel to be fired upon with no prior warning by a German submarine.²¹

From about February of 1915 until the Armistice was signed, Germany instituted three major submarine campaigns against the British and Allied shipping. Of course, American losses of life and shipping tonnage paled in comparison to what Great Britain lost on a monthly basis. From February through August of 1917, the British lost an average of 605,191 tons a month. A common guess, albeit probably inaccurate, posits that Britain was mere months away from being starved into surrender before the United States finally came to the rescue. We cannot know the exact amount of time that was required to literally starve Britain out of the war, but the possibility of that happening was very real. Research scholar John Abbatiello speculates that the final German submarine campaign that began in early 1917 came imminently close to “choking the British economy” and starving the island nation into surrender.²²

In response to the massive amounts of British shipping that was lost during the first years of the war, historian David Kennedy posed the question, “Would Wilson hesitate long enough for the U-boats mortally to cripple Britain” before the United States was willing to get involved? For a long time between 1914 and 1917, the answer seemed to be yes. It must be stated that the United States and Great Britain shared no natural alliance, but American interests rested much closer to an Allied victory than it did with a

²¹ Carlisle, *Sovereignty*, 106-107.

²² V.E. Tarrant, *The U-boat Offensive, 1914-1945* (London: Cassell, 2000), 152-153; John Abbatiello, “Atlantic U-boat Campaign,” https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/atlantic_u-boat_campaign. A table under the heading, “The Final U-Boat Campaign” lists the monthly tonnage lost by both the Germans and the British from February through August 1917. I averaged the gross tonnage to determine the monthly average.

German victory. There were many economic ties between Britain and the United States that did not exist as heavily with Germany. Therefore, an Allied, or British, victory was more essential to American prosperity and led the United States to identify more closely with Britain than Germany. This calculation seemed especially true for President Wilson and especially obvious to Kitchin.²³

Inevitably, Claude Kitchin protested against Wilson's handling of the so-called "submarine crisis" in 1916 and early 1917 during which the German policy of Unrestricted Submarine War led to the sinking of no fewer than three American merchant ships. Since the *Lusitania* was a British vessel the Germans could explain their way out of their share of the blame for the sinking to the United States. One interesting note to point out, however, is that the *Lusitania* had been known to fly the American flag on occasion. The tactic of displaying the flag of a neutral nation or no flag at all was common. On February 12, 1915, months before her sinking, the *Polk County News* reported that the "British steamer Lusitania of the Cunard line" sailed from New York to Liverpool while flying the American flag after passing "Queenstown until she entered Mersey. This is vouched for by American passengers who crossed on her." She was warned by another British liner company that there were two German submarines in the area of travel. The ship's captain reported that "he had a right to fly the flag of a neutral country for protection of [unneutral] passengers and mails which his ship was carrying."

²³ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 5.

There is no evidence that the ship was flying any flag but the Union Jack on the day of its sinking.²⁴

Despite Kitchin's neutral feelings about the world conflict, he did condemn Germany for its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare and Great Britain for its naval blockades, as he believed that the policies of both Great Britain and Imperial Germany violated American rights. When Germany sank the *Lusitania*, he favored a resolution warning Americans to stay off of the ships of belligerent nations. "Our citizens ought to be warned not to take passage on armed vessels of belligerents. This would keep us out of the war" he confided to a North Carolinian who wrote to his office about the incident. "It is common sense and real patriotism" to issue this kind of warning, he was reassured by another.²⁵

One of the more prominent women's organizations in North Carolina sent a telegram to Kitchin's office to inform him of their support of this resolution. "We American women beg you to use every influence to secure action preventing citizens traveling on belligerent ships thus jeopardizing safety and peace of our country," wrote Mrs. Ethelina Bolton to Kitchin. Kitchin received enough support for this stance that it became clear to him that he was on the right path. The Majority Leader called the sinking

²⁴ "Flies Stars and Stripes," *The Polk County News*, February 12, 1915; Greg King and Penny Wilson, *Lusitania: Triumph, Tragedy, and the End of the Edwardian Age* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), 273; Lester H. Brune, *Chronological History of U.S. Foreign Relations: 1607-1932* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 365; Lawrence Sondhaus, *World War One: The Global Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 276. I am not the first historian to notice the flag controversy, but it has been woefully underrecognized as a source of debate.

²⁵ Kitchin to Ralston J. Markoe, March 11, 1916, Box 10, Claude Kitchin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Kitchin to Captain D. T. Ward, February 28, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers; Dr. John O. Evjen, Dr. Hal Dewing, and I.J. Sweetser to Kitchin, March 2, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers.

“inexcusable” and supported the recommendation that Americans stay off of the ships of any belligerent nation. He remarked in a letter to a constituent that “it is incredible to me how anyone can object to this country advising its own citizens not to take passage on armed belligerent ships.”²⁶

Well before the newspaper advertisements from the German government, or the sinking of the *Lusitania* itself, the American government considered issuing warnings about travelling on the ships of hostile nations, such as those of Great Britain. The United States was not the first nation to consider issuing warnings to its citizens. The Chamber of German American Commerce was quick to remind Kitchin of the precedent. Britain warned her own subjects to stay clear of ships belonging to both Russia and Japan during the Russo-Japanese War in the early part of the century, for example. Even the United States had done something similar in the recent past. Americans were warned that they took their own risk by staying in Mexico during the “Mexican disorders.” The idea of warning people to steer clear of hostile areas was not new and seemed a reasonable course to take. A constituent wrote to Kitchin to explain, “We think that the sooner Americans are made to understand that they must be reasonable and use only neutral ships the better it will be for American peace.”²⁷

While Imperial Germany’s unrestricted submarine warfare tactics nearly drew the United States to war before 1917, Kitchin was equally appalled by Great Britain’s blockade of Central Power ports. He explained that from 1915 onward, Britain violated

²⁶ Telegram, Mrs. Ethelina Bolton to Kitchin, March 6, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers; Kitchin to O. L. Ipock, March 4, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers.

²⁷ Heinrich Clarkes to Kitchin, January 4, 1915, Box 1, Kitchin Papers.

American neutrality rights by denying entrance to any nation's port that Britain did not allow. According to Kitchin, Britain denied American access by declaring a war zone around German waters. So, the question was raised of how that action was any different than Germany's declaration of a war zone around British waters. Neither policy benefitted the United States, and both caused hardship to the American economy, although the German policy did kill Americans while Britain's did not. From a practical economic standpoint, however, both belligerents injured America.²⁸

Kitchin's great hero and confederate, William Jennings Bryan, pleaded for an evenhanded policy. Before his resignation as secretary of state, Bryan suggested to Wilson that ships carrying war contraband be prohibited from carrying passengers. In this case, Bryan meant war contraband to be anything of military value that could be used by Britain, France, Russia, or another hostile nation. Bryan read an editorial with this suggestion and thought it was good enough to recommend to the president, or at least some form of that rule. The great orator argued that Germany had a right to prevent contraband from going to its enemy, and ships with contraband on board should not be allowed to rely on them as human shields. "It would be like putting women and children in front of an army," Bryan remarked to the president. Bryan went so far as to suggest to a presidential counselor, and future secretary of state, Robert Lansing, that Americans taking passage on a British vessel bound for a British port and passing through a war zone might be considered to have done so of their own free will and peril. Therefore, they were not necessarily entitled to the full protection of the American government. Bryan

²⁸ *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 332.

tried to find a solution in this quagmire that would keep the United States on the moderate path, or at least the path least likely to lead to war for America. Kitchin employed the same tactic. Neither man necessarily blamed the passengers aboard sunken ships, but they did also suggest that the Germans had a right to prevent their enemies from moving materials of war.²⁹

Wilson increasingly moved away from Bryan's approach. Secretary of Agriculture David Houston, a North Carolina native, recalled that the President discussed with his cabinet the possibility of arming merchant ships at the beginning of the third, and final, wave of German unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917. At that time, Wilson still maintained that he desired neutrality over actual entry to the war. The President's solution, which he discussed with his cabinet, was to try the policy of "armed neutrality" rather than asking for a declaration of war. He believed that the American people were getting fed up with Germany's continued betrayal of American neutrality but not to the point yet where they would accept a war. Perhaps the middle course of arming merchant ships for their own defense would work.³⁰

The President waited for some kind of "overt act," such as the destruction of an American merchant ship, which would give him a good reason to go to Congress and ask it for approval to arm merchant ships. The overt act on the Atlantic Ocean did not come in February though. Perhaps if Wilson waited an extra couple of weeks, the "tipping

²⁹ William Jennings Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, May 9, 1915, and William Jennings Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, May 10, 1915 with memorandum enclosure from Robert Lansing, both in Link, ed., *Papers of Wilson*, 134-135.

³⁰ David F. Houston, *Eight Years with Wilson's Cabinet, 1913 to 1920: With a Personal Estimate of the President* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926), 235-239; Arthur Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 340-342.

point” of sinkings could have given him the firm excuse he was looking for, but another event took precedence. On February 20, American Ambassador to Britain, Walter Page, was given the infamous Zimmermann Telegram, which he relayed to Wilson the next day. The notorious request for Mexico to go to war with the United States did not change Wilson’s mind about anything. He had already decided on armed neutrality, but the telegram gave the president what he needed, and he went to Congress to officially request armed neutrality late in the month. Even as the president was addressing Congress about this request, someone came into the chamber and brought the news that a German submarine sank another British liner with Americans on board.³¹

In a small concession to the President and preparedness, Kitchin voted in favor of arming American merchant ships to defend against German submarine aggression. This concession appears quite shocking on the surface, especially after Kitchin spent so much ink explaining to people that arming merchant ships would definitely lead to war with Germany. “If the President persists in his course with respect to armed merchantmen, we are bound to get into war with Germany” he wrote to one supporter the previous year. There are a few explanations for why Kitchin voted in favor of arming the merchant ships, given his opposition to the idea. First, Kitchin may have hoped to preserve American rights on the seas. Second, Kitchin recognized Wilson’s honest, if misguided, efforts to keep the United States out of war relied upon the protection of its shipping. And third, Kitchin may have seen the writing on the wall and realized any opposition to this

³¹ Link, *Campaigns*, 342-347, Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You*, 126, 177; Boghardt, *Zimmermann Telegram*, 1-9.

bill would be futile, as four hundred of his colleagues were ready to vote in favor of it. But in the case of arming merchant ships, the action did come down to actual safety. By 1917, Germany instituted its third, and final, campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare, which was the final straw for Wilson and led him to ask for the war declaration. As a practical man, Kitchin saw the need for armed defense in this case.³²

Kitchin consistently asserted that the American navy was already powerful enough to defend the United States, with only Great Britain possessing a larger one. Given that fact, there was no one for the United States to prepare against despite the propaganda from the “jingoese and war-traffickers.” Kitchin also reminded North Carolina in an opinion article that the three hundred million dollars necessary to finance any expansion would be raised by direct or excise taxes to be paid almost certainly by the common man. As he noted in 1915, “I have had enough experience with taxation to know that those who are howling most loudly now for the big Army and Navy program will protest and howl most wildly against any measures which may be attempted or proposed for increase of taxes.” Kitchin’s experience on the Ways and Means Committee made him the leading expert in the country to make this statement, and it would ultimately turn out to be true.³³

Even before any new army and navy building programs were proposed, Kitchin made a distinction between different types of military preparedness programs. He supported a limited defensive type of program. In the limited plan, the United States need

³² Kitchin to Joseph E. Pogue, February 28, 1916, Box 9, Kitchin Papers; Elizabeth Steele, “Claude Kitchin and the War Preparedness Controversy, 1915-1917,” (master’s thesis, Miami University, 2003), 43.

³³ Pamphlet, “The Nation’s Preparedness: Facts by Claude Kitchin,” November 20, 1915, Box 1, Kitchin Papers.

only prepare against the remote possibility of attack on America's shores, and this preparation could be accomplished without bankrupting the American people. "I believe I favor building more submarines and torpedo destroyers and enlarging our capacity to lay mines," he wrote to a colleague with similar views on preparedness. "I think [that] is wise and most probably necessary as a defensive measure." Many North Carolinians agreed with Kitchin's limited plan: "I hope you will continue to fight to the finish, not against all preparedness but in favor of only a reasonable preparedness, and prevent [if possible] the extravagant expenditure of money which is now contemplated," wrote one constituent.³⁴

The other option was an offensive program, which Kitchin whole heartedly disagreed with and actively fought against. Kitchin argued that such a program would benefit big businesses and arms manufacturers at the expense of ordinary North Carolinians and had a much higher probability of bringing the United States into direct conflict with Germany. He noted to a colleague, "I feel it is big ammunition and war equipment interests that are trying to manufacture public sentiment into favoring [big preparedness] propaganda and with the attempt to intimidate Congress in entering upon it." Kitchin kept returning to these concerns to explain his stance against preparedness. He tried time and time again to convince North Carolina and Americans everywhere that there would be no benefit for the United States by entering this war. Kitchin reexplained this point many times to numerous concerned constituents.³⁵

³⁴ Kitchin to Warren Worth Bailey, August 3, 1915, Box 1, Kitchin Papers; W.C. Dowd to Kitchin, December 13, 1915, Box 6, Kitchin Papers.

³⁵ Kitchin to Clyde Tavenner, August 3, 1915, Box 1, Kitchin Papers.

The people of North Carolina made their support of Kitchin's stance on the navy clear to him. "In regard to the preparedness question [I] would like to say for your information that I believe three-fourths of our people are solidly with you in your attitude on the matter," telegrammed W.C. Dowd of Charlotte. Hundreds of letters from his constituents gave him the assurance that he was acting in accordance with their wishes. In fact, historians speculate that as late as April 1, 1917, a majority of Americans were opposed to entering the war.³⁶

Steadfast as Kitchin was, he never gave in by fully committing to preparedness activities, despite a promise to keep an open mind on the preparedness issue. Kitchin later took this same strong will to the House floor before the vote to declare war. He knew that he was on the losing side of the argument, but his conviction, and what he believed were the convictions of his constituents, would not allow him to vote in favor of a war with Germany. The preparedness programs put forth by President Wilson called for huge increases in army and naval expenditures in pursuit of preparing the country for the war.³⁷

In response to the President's preparedness movement campaigns and the recommendations of increased naval spending and the proposed continental army, Kitchin wrote a lengthy opinion piece in a weekly periodical explaining his opposition to "senseless" preparedness. Kitchin penned the article in response to one in *The Seven Seas*

³⁶ W.C. Dowd to Kitchin, December 13, 1915, Box 6, Kitchin Papers; Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York: Harper, 1954), 275. For examples of letters of support, see Kitchin Papers, Boxes 11 and 12.

³⁷ Woodrow Wilson to Kitchin, October 27, 1915 and Kitchin to Woodrow Wilson, October 29, 1915, *Woodrow Wilson Papers*; *New York Times*, October 27, 1915; H. Larry Ingle, "Pilgrimage to Reform, a Life of Claude Kitchin" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1967), 103.

Magazine, the magazine of the Navy League, which tried to pressure Kitchin into keeping his feelings private. Undaunted, the Majority Leader rejected the arguments that so-called “patriotic societies,” such as the Navy League, peddled which suggested that the United States was in a helpless and defenseless state of dangerous unpreparedness. Instead, he declared that those arguments were “pure tommy-rot, BASED NOT ON A SINGLE FACT.”³⁸

A month later, Kitchin wrote a follow up piece to make sure his stance was clear. Even in the early twentieth century, writers could engage the “caps lock” to drive home a point, and the Majority Leader was not afraid to use it. He wrote that, “THE FACT IS [the United States has] THE STRONGEST AND MOST POWERFUL NAVY IN THE WORLD, except for that of Great Britain.” He explained in several more all-capital sentences that many war hawks were exaggerating America’s ill-prepared military strength. They focused on the number of ships and their tonnage. According to Kitchin, numbers and tonnage did not always indicate actual superiority, but he noted, as early as 1915, that the American navy had more ships and over forty thousand more tons of shipping than Germany did.³⁹

According to Kitchin, the American navy was superior to every other navy in the world, except for the British navy. The United States had a far superior navy to that of Germany, even before any additional American naval build-up took place. A strong navy had never historically been a necessity for Germany because Germany boasted one of the

³⁸ Claude Kitchin, “Why I am Opposed to Preparedness,” *Issues & Events* 3, no. 23 (December 4, 1915): 3-5.

³⁹ Kitchin, “Why I am Opposed to Preparedness,” 3-4.

strongest armies in the world and was always a dominant force on land. However, as Kaiser Wilhelm II came to power and Germany sought to expand its influence on the world stage, he saw a large navy as a necessary instrument to compete with other nations, especially with Great Britain. Throughout the early 1900s, he saw every international incident as a lesson that proved the necessity of a strong navy. Kaiser Wilhelm supported a series of naval bills first proposed by German Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz in 1898, aimed at doubling the number of German warships. Over the next few years, more German naval bills were passed in Wilhelm's quest to compete with the Royal Navy. The build-up helped Germany prepare a strong navy by the start of the Great War, but it was still less than half as good as Britain's. Incidentally, the German navy proved to be rather ineffective throughout the war. The only major battle it participated in, the Battle of Jutland in 1915, was more or less a draw between Britain and Germany. After the encounter, the Germans retreated to port, where the navy remained for the rest of the war. And the Germany navy was not even as big as America's navy.⁴⁰

"WE ARE PREPARED" Kitchin made sure to note after comparing America's naval strength to Germany's. But it was not just increasing naval expenses that Kitchin argued against, though he was sure to remind any readers that all extra appropriations for the military must come from an increase in taxes paid by the American people. There were also rumblings about dissolving the American National Guard and replacing it with a Continental Army, which would be basically the same kind of organization, although only the President, rather than state governors, would have the ability to call it to action.

⁴⁰ Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 146-148.

As with the navy, Kitchin was sure to point out that the American army was already sufficient for defense.⁴¹

Representative Kitchin opposed both the Continental Army and the proposed increase in naval spending. Privately, he boasted to a colleague that “we have already practically defeated. . . [Wilson’s] army program; that is, it seems that we will certainly knock out his Continental army.”⁴² In the end, the House and Senate ended up passing a National Defense Act between March and May of 1916, which did not establish a militaristic Continental Army. Therefore, this action appeared to be a victory for the anti-preparedness group, led by Kitchin. Interestingly, despite their opposing viewpoints on the implementation of the Continental Army, Kitchin viewed Secretary of War Lindley Garrison, amicably. Upon learning of his resignation, Kitchin considered it “unfortunate that Mr. Garrison should resign,” as Kitchin “regarded him as one of the strongest men in the [President’s] cabinet” but ultimately recognized that Garrison would not have given up the fight for the plan.⁴³

Kitchin and his allies were not as successful in their opposition to the naval plan. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels called for the construction of ten battleships, six battle cruisers, ten cruisers, fifty destroyers, one hundred submarines and various other vessels over a five-year period, a plan that President Wilson approved in October 1915. This decision, however, was not a total defeat for the anti-preparedness camp. The final allotment for the naval expenditure request was “too much appropriation by many

⁴¹ Kitchin, *Issues and Events*, 3-4.

⁴² Kitchin to C. O. McMichael, January 22, 1916, Box 7, Kitchin Papers; Link, *Confusions*, 39.

⁴³ Link, *Confusions*, 46; Link, *Progressive Era*, 184-188; Arnett, *Claude Kitchin*, 92; *New York Times*, February 12, 1916.

millions, but it is infinitely better than the program, first proposed” by Secretary Daniels. It seemed much easier for Congress and the President to approve naval monies based on the very much more tangible threat of war at sea than war on land.⁴⁴

The whole debate surrounding America’s army and naval preparedness may have passed on without being put to the test. However, an international crisis close to home began simultaneously to the events unfolding in Europe and in the Atlantic. Indeed, events nearly drew the United States into an international war with her neighbor to the south, Mexico. American relations with Mexico had been on shaky footing since before the Mexican American War many decades earlier. And in the years since that war ended, border raids and small skirmishes happened regularly on both sides of the Rio Grande. Through the early years of the twentieth century, tensions began to rise again. And in 1911, the Mexican dictator, Porfirio Diaz, was ousted during a revolution. Diaz’s successor, Francisco Madero, was subsequently forced to resign and was later shot by a popular military officer that he appointed to quell rebellion, although it is unclear who ordered the assassination. In any event, Mexico was forcefully taken over by Victoriano de la Huerta. This action did not sit well with either President Wilson or with Representative Kitchin. The Mexican revolution led to an increase in Mexican *bandito* gangs and more frequent border raids, notably by Pancho Villa. The American response was to send twenty thousand troops to the border, with five thousand sent in direct response to Villa’s raid on New Mexico.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Kitchin to O.G. Villard, May 24, 1916, Box 11, Kitchin Papers; *New York World*, October 16, 1915; *New York Times*, October 20, 1915; Link, *Confusions*, 15.

⁴⁵ Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York: Harper, 1954), 122-123; John S. D. Eisenhower, *Intervention!: The United States and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1917*

There may have been some truth to the hawkish suggestion that America was vulnerable to invasion, but the oceanic barrier proved that American vulnerability was not necessarily from Germany. The more urgent vulnerability came from its southern neighbor. The United States almost did go to war with Mexico for a second time, and a lack of preparedness became evident. During the crisis with Mexico, American machine guns failed to work properly, reserve units of American troops were desperately needed to help but were lacking, and the cavalry proved to be ill-trained. Assistant Chief of Staff Tasker Bliss suggested that if Germany were able to breach the Atlantic barrier, it might well be through Mexico, in violation of the Monroe Doctrine no less. Still, while the idea of a German invasion of the United States via Mexico seemed, and was, unrealistic, the border crisis proved that the American army was not as prepared as would be expected in an industrialized nation while the world was at war. It was also clear from the raiding that in the event of a real emergency, many thousands, or perhaps millions, more soldiers would be needed to defend the United States.⁴⁶

The crew of an American ship sailing in Mexican waters near Tampico were arrested but quickly released, which was the single event that nearly turned the incident into a second Mexican American War. Wilson demanded full apologies and that the Mexican soldiers salute the American flag. The latter demand was refused, and Wilson used it as an excuse to secure a change of Mexican leadership. The president requested congressional authority to use force in Mexico, and surprisingly, Kitchin agreed with the

(New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 7-29 and 46-68; Thomas Boghardt, *The Zimmermann Telegram: Intelligence, Diplomacy, and America's Entry Into World War I* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 33-34.

⁴⁶ Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War*, 189-190.

President, as did a congressional majority, leading to the seizure of Vera Cruz. The incident cost the lives of nineteen Americans, with seventy-one wounded, and proved Wilson's determination, or stubbornness, to preserve his ideals. There was astonishment across America and the world that Wilson would spill blood over such a trivial matter.⁴⁷

In anticipation of a large crisis, the secretary of war notified Governor Locke Craig that he would need to mobilize the North Carolina National Guard in June. Their mission, the same as many other state Guards and militias, was to be ready to protect the "frontier," or border. Three regiments of infantry, two of cavalry, a field hospital, and an ambulance company were requested for this assignment. Craig assured the president that the National Guard of North Carolina was ready to obey any orders from the White House and were enthusiastic to participate in this venture. The only concern Craig had was that he wanted to be sure that the North Carolina brigade would not be separated and sent to different areas. The North Carolina National Guard did not see much action during the border crisis, as General Pershing preferred to use regular army units.⁴⁸

Wilson had not been entirely honest with the American public as to what the real purpose of the intervention in Mexico was and that may have led, in part, to Kitchin's support. Kitchin has often been described as a pacifist, though he was not, so his agreeing to a violent course of action, such as invading Mexico, may seem odd. When it came to the actual security of America's borders (instead of the fantastical threat posed by

⁴⁷ Link, *Woodrow Wilson*, 123; James Holt, *Congressional Insurgents and the Party System, 1900-1916* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 122-123.

⁴⁸ May F. Jones, ed., *Public Letters and Papers of Locke Craig: Governor of North Carolina, 1913-1917* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company State Printers, 1916), 225-229; Matthew Peek, "North Carolina and the Mexican Punitive Expedition," NCDCCR Blog, February 4, 2017, <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/world-war-i/nc-mexican-punitive-expedition>.

German submarines), he tended to agree with a military solution. After all, in the speech he made directly before the war resolution in 1917, he noted that Mexico posed a much greater threat to the United States than did Germany only a year prior. He voted for intervention against Mexican aggression because he believed that Mexico posed a real threat to American security in 1916. “I approved that course then [intervention in Mexico]; I approve it now,” he stated in 1917.⁴⁹

The threat from Mexico became far more frightening in the United States following the public release of the now-famous Zimmermann Telegram. Newspapers around the country reported in early March that Imperial Germany proposed an alliance with Mexico if the United States entered the World War on the Allied side. The overture promised generous financial support to Mexico from Germany and with the understanding that the Germans would support the Mexican reconquest of New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. Germany also suggested that Mexico might also bring Japan into a new alliance in order to dominate and keep American influence out of the Pacific Ocean. The reality was far less real than the threat. Mexico’s instability, evident in the ongoing civil war, prevented this alliance and a potential foreign war. The instability of the Mexican government also prevented any war with the United States long before the telegram was sent to Ambassador Zimmermann. The Mexican military agreed that it was far too inadequate to launch a full-scale invasion of the United States, let alone control the reconquered American states. Few, if any, serious scholars and historians today consider the Zimmermann Telegram to be the major factor that pushed Wilson to ask for

⁴⁹ Holt, *Congressional Insurgents*, 123; *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 333.

the declaration of war, but it is one of the contributing factors that is necessarily included. The telegram did have an enormous effect on the American public's attitude towards Germany, though, and pushed many who were still neutral in thought and action toward the Allies and away from the Central Powers. No other event had yet stirred such feelings in the American people.⁵⁰

Despite Mexico's self-assessed inadequacies, it became clear to Kitchin that Mexico represented a more direct challenge to the United States than any of the Central Powers of Europe did. The extent of Mexico's internal weaknesses did not become evident to most Americans until well after the World War ended. Kitchin was actually shocked that Wilson did not ask for a declaration of war against Mexico, given the provocation of the border raids on both sides that may well have warranted one. This lack of more significant action against Mexico reinforced Kitchin's opposition to the President's preparedness campaign. Preparedness was designed for a war, or according to Colonel Edward House, the prevention of a war, with Germany, after all. It should have been clear that if the United States was able to muster a force of twenty thousand to send to the Mexican American border, then the country was not as unprepared for a military conflict as many officials suggested.⁵¹

Despite the fact that machine guns failed during the border crisis, reserve troops were unavailable to be sent where they were most needed, and the cavalry was under-prepared for the incidents on the border with Mexico, the army and navy proved that they

⁵⁰ Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Zimmermann Telegram: America Enters the War, 1917-1918* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 199; Arthur Link, *Campaigns*, 354; Boghardt, *Zimmermann Telegram*, 1-8, 159.

⁵¹ *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 333.

could defend U.S. territory. Indeed, the North Carolina soldiers that were mustered to do their bit in Mexico were there, and even paid extra for their service. Eight Tar Heel soldiers died during the Mexican crisis. The United States proved its potential for preparedness. Not everyone in Congress was convinced, of course, and many surmised the opposite conclusion: that the Mexican incident revealed the work that America still had to do to prepare the army. There were two ways to view the crisis. Setbacks and failures for some represented opportunities for improvement to others.⁵²

By April of 1917, the merits of being pro or anti-preparedness had become moot. The renewed campaign of German submarine warfare began on February 1, 1917. Germany endeavored to keep the United States neutral, but in combination with the Zimmermann telegram scandal, it proved too much for the Wilson Administration and Congress to bear. The president called a joint session of Congress into an “extraordinary session” because there were “serious choices of policy to be made.” Wilson lamented that German submarines were sinking every ship, neutral or not, in British waters. He said that Germany was conducting “a war against all nations” with “no discrimination.” He believed neutrality had failed to keep the United States safe and maintained America’s moral superiority. Wilson claimed, “We act without animus. . . in armed opposition to an irresponsible government which has thrown aside all considerations of humanity and of right and is running amuck.”⁵³

⁵² “Mexicans Release U.S. Soldiers; Immediate Break is thus Averted,” *Hertford County Herald*, July 7, 1916; Bandel, *North Carolina*, 16-17; Clarence C. Clendenen, *Blood on the Border: The United States Army and the Mexican Irregulars* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), introduction.

⁵³ Woodrow Wilson, *Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Albert Bushnell Hart (New York: The Modern Library Publishers, 1918), 188-197.

With that speech, the Congress acted. Senator Thomas Martin of Virginia introduced the war resolution to the Senate and Representative Henry Flood, also of Virginia, to the House. Over the next three days, both houses of congress debated the vote for war. There was clear support in both houses towards voting “yea” on the resolution. Of those who agreed that war was necessary, there was disagreement on the war aims. Many southern congressmen did not agree with Wilson’s stated purpose of “fighting for all mankind,” and reasoned instead that it was a fight for American rights and honor. In the Senate, the two most vocal senators who opposed the resolution during the debate were Democrats William Stone of Missouri and James Vardaman of Mississippi. Both referred to the conflict as a “European war.” However, with little substantial debate, the Senate voted 82-6 on April 4, 1917, in support of the measure to declare war on Germany.⁵⁴

The final step to complete the resolution came in the House. Democratic Representative Jeff McLemore of Texas spoke first in opposition. Many more speeches came but most were in favor of the declaration. Majority Leader Kitchin followed a speech from William Goodwin, a Democrat from Arkansas, in favor of the war resolution. Several of Kitchin’s colleagues urged him to remain silent or simply cast his vote as “nay” and not make a fuss about it, since it was clear that the resolution was going to pass regardless. Some Wilson Administration cabinet members pleaded with him to stand by the Democratic Party. Even Wilson himself supposedly sent a telephone message to remind him of his duty. But the strong-willed Kitchin could not bite his

⁵⁴ *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 104, 129, 205-251

tongue during such an important time. He believed that he must read his carefully prepared speech. A lifetime of oral preparation led him to this moment, the most important speech he had yet delivered.⁵⁵

“Mr. Chairman,” Kitchin said as he walked to the podium at the front of the House floor at about midnight on a rainy, dreary night to applause from his colleagues. He was recognized for his allotted ten minutes. “In view of the many assumptions of loyalty and patriotism on the part of some of those who favor the resolution . . . let me at once remind the House that it takes neither moral nor physical courage to declare war for others to fight,” and he was met with more applause. Kitchin made it clear that he knew his position was on the losing side of the argument and would continue alone if necessary: “I have come to the undoubting conclusion that I should vote against this resolution,” he told the chamber and more applause ensued. “Half of the civilized world is now a slaughterhouse for human beings. This Nation is the last hope of peace on earth.” For nine more minutes, Kitchin made his final, passionate plea to his colleagues to vote against the war resolution. He knew that he could not win the debate but refused to keep silent on it. He explained how both Germany and Great Britain were doing harm to the United States and could see no reason to take the side of one over the other. He described the much greater threat that Mexico posed to America and how inconceivable it was that, somehow, the United States was able to find a peaceful resolution with her southern neighbor but could not find the same peace with Germany. “Why can we not, why should we not, forego for the time being the violation of our rights by Germany and

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, April 6, 1917; Ingle, “Pilgrimage,” 132.

do as we did with Great Britain, do as we did with Mexico?" A speech in favor of the war resolution followed Kitchin's. The Majority Leader argued for what he believed was right and failed. The House voted only hours later, 373-50 in support of war. History will call them "the immortal fifty," wrote one Baptist minister.⁵⁶

The day after the dramatic speech, Kitchin was called back to North Carolina because his eldest brother, Samuel Boaz Kitchin, suddenly died after a year of poor, but not generally life-threatening, health. One of Kitchin's secretaries, Charles H. England, spent several days dealing with the arrival of hundreds of letters and telegrams from across North Carolina and around the country responding to the Majority Leader's speech. Many of these enthusiastically expressed admiration for Kitchin's courage and stand against the war. To satisfy public demand, Kitchin's office had twenty-five thousand copies of his speech printed.⁵⁷

"I read your speech with much satisfaction [and] knew you would have courage to do what you thought was right," wrote one Tar Heel man in support of Kitchin. "Please accept my heartiest congratulations for the best speech ever delivered in the halls of Congress, every word you spoke are my sentiments and I believe [those of] a very large majority of the American people," wrote another. Many more examples of these messages of congratulation flowed into Kitchin's office over the next several days. Many

⁵⁶ Robert B. Morris, ed., *Encyclopedia of American History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 309; *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 332-333; Telegram, J. G. Pullman to Kitchin, April 6, 1917, Box 19, Kitchin Papers.

⁵⁷ "Funeral of Mr. S. B. Kitchin," *Scotland Neck Commonwealth*, April 10, 1917; Public Printer to Kitchin, April 11, 1917, Box 19, Kitchin Papers. One of Kitchin's secretaries, Charles H. England, indicated in many letters between April 3 and April 14 that Claude Kitchin was called away for the funeral, and that he would return as soon as he was able.

of those letters and messages of support may be attributed to Kitchin's courage to stand by his convictions, rather than personal support of his stance. There were, of course, a handful of letters from citizens who detested Kitchin's speech, with some even calling on Kitchin to resign. There was, however, roughly a ten-to-one split in favor of the Congressman's position, which may indicate that supporters were more active in their correspondence than opponents. In any case, the number of supporters suggest that public opinion about the war through the whole preparedness period remained divided.⁵⁸

The speech was also remarkable and memorable to Kitchin's colleagues. Jeanette Rankin, the first woman to serve in the House of Representatives, remembered it vividly almost fifty years later in an interview. Others called it a heroic act. As with the public, the speech was not universally applauded in Congress. Several representatives called on Kitchin to resign as majority leader since he would not stand with the president, but when one called on him to resign from the House, he was greeted with hisses. Despite their preference on the vote, nearly everyone agreed that the speech made an impact. Alabama Representative Thomas Heflin suspected that Kitchin may have increased the total "nays" from a dozen or fifteen to fifty. One reporter believed that even representatives who gave prowar speeches or interviews in their home districts had their minds changed.⁵⁹

It was no surprise that northern big city newspapers, such as New York City and Philadelphia, supported Heflin's call for Kitchin to resign. Although he rarely let the

⁵⁸ Telegram, C. W. Grice to Kitchin, April 6, 1917, Box 19, Kitchin Papers; Telegram, John W. Lamberth to Kitchin, April 6, 1917, Box 19, Kitchin Papers; *Smithfield Herald*, April 10, 1917. I added punctuation to the original telegram messages.

⁵⁹ *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 348-351; *New York Tribune*, April 6, 1917; *Smithfield Herald*, April 7, 1917.

northern newspapermen get under his skin, at home, papers in North Carolina began to turn on him too. A writer in the *Wilmington Dispatch* called Kitchin's vote, "the humiliation of North Carolina." And a writer with the *Charlotte Observer* wondered if Kitchin's conscience should disqualify him from his leadership role.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, once war was declared, and as he promised in his dramatic speech, Kitchin could not continue to oppose the will of the American people, so he ended up supporting the American war effort financially from his position as Ways and Means Chairman. He later disagreed with Wilson's selective service conscription program, as did many in Congress. Rather, he supported a more "honorable" volunteer army. This sentiment of preferring a volunteer instead of a drafted army was prevalent throughout most of the South. However, despite the preparedness measures taken by the federal government through 1915 and 1916, the nation was still not adequately prepared for the coming war.

⁶⁰ "Resent Act of Webb and Kitchin," *Wilmington Dispatch*, April 9, 1917; *Charlotte Observer*, April 7, 1917, clippings, Box 48, Kitchin Papers.

CHAPTER V

NORTH CAROLINA FUNDS THE WAR, 1917-1918

Two irreconcilable principles are contending for the mastery in the world today. We had believed until the Emperor of Germany plunged the world into war, that never again could the policy of Alexander and Napoleon jeopardize civilization. But the challenge has been made and the house of Hohenzollern by force seeks to impose its will upon every nation its military machine can overcome and chart the ocean highways for the great American Republic. If the policy of absolutism and force could succeed, free government would perish from the earth.

--Josephus Daniels, "Our Country Accepts the Challenge"

Claude Kitchin realized the predicament he was in while he delivered his passionate speech to the House on the dramatic night before the war vote. He stood starkly opposed Wilson's war-preparedness campaign from the very beginning and long believed that if the United States was preparing for a war, that a war would find it. He consistently saw Wilson inching closer toward the Allies and Great Britain and further from neutrality. And the majority of the country and government wanted the war. His vote against the war resolution could have signaled his own political suicide, or "death knell" as he put it. However, the resolution passed, and the United States would soon be sending soldiers "over there." Kitchin recognized the reality of the situation and agreed that the will of the majority should be followed. He helped to pass bills that would fund the American war effort and always took efforts to keep the greatest burden of the cost off of those who could least afford it. And while Kitchin worked to protect the average

American, the state of North Carolina stood to benefit from increased demands for goods and food needed for the war effort.

Wars are obviously expensive in both money and material. The United States government, in 1917, lacked the money to fund a military expedition to Europe. Revenue had to be raised. A new and more reliable base of income would be required to pay for the military buildup necessary to fight in the war. The American people would be called on to provide these new revenues through several campaigns of Liberty Loan Drives, as well as through increased income taxes. A revenue bill battle began during the preparedness campaign as far back as early 1916. Most Democrats agreed that the whole burden of funding a war should not fall on ordinary Americans; rather, congressmen like Kitchin sought to increase taxes on big businesses, especially those in the North that he claimed stood to profit the most from war. Letters from anti-preparedness Democrats flooded Kitchin's office in January and February 1917. They demanded a large increase of income taxes, inheritance taxes, and especially taxes on munitions manufacturers. For the most part, Kitchin's role was as the financier of the American war effort. And the work was hard. The state of North Carolina stood to profit from the war as a heavily agricultural state, but there were also opportunities in manufacturing that could bring jobs and money into the state.¹

¹ Rep. W.W. Bailey to Kitchin, January 27, 1916, Box 7, Claude Kitchin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Rep. C.H. Tavenner to Kitchin, January 27, 1916, Box 7, Kitchin Papers; Rep. W.L. Hinsley to Kitchin, January 27, 1916, Box 7, Kitchin Papers; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 61-63.

Kitchin took center stage as a national financier for the first time in 1909 when the debate over the Payne-Aldrich Tariff gripped national politics. As a progressive reformer, he claimed that Republicans wanted the tariff only to protect the special interests of wealthy, mostly northern, elites. He concluded that high protective tariffs only served to create monopolies and trusts that would rob independent small farmers. These arguments were echoed by most southerners concerning tariffs at the time. Kitchin, and many of his southern colleagues maintained that only openly competitive markets and overseas trade would lead to prosperity for American farmers. It was ultimately Kitchin's strong-willed stance on the Payne-Aldrich Tariff that led him to his leadership position.²

Since the founding of the American republic, tariffs remained one of the biggest revenue sources for the United States government. Kitchin and his agrarian allies maintained that the tariff should exist mainly for that purpose. The modern world and coming war challenged the notion that tariffs, along with excise taxes, could produce enough money for the federal government. The first attempts at a national income tax took place in the nineteenth century as war-time measures, but as public opinion soured, these income taxes were repealed long before the first decade of the twentieth century. However, support for a federal income tax grew among progressives and agrarians at that

² C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 186-187, 317-320. See Chapter II for more on Kitchin's rise to leadership posts.

time, culminating in 1913 with the passage of the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution.³

Despite the adoption of this constitutional amendment only a few years earlier, federal income taxes remained a modest source of income for the government. More revenue was necessary to fund increases to America's armed forces. Kitchin introduced An Act to Increase the Revenue, and Other Purposes in 1916 to tackle the issue. A congressional report on the new revenue bill estimated an amount of money the United States would need to raise to fund the war effort. After accounting for all existing sources of federal revenue, the report projected that America would need to raise an additional \$266,922,000 beyond its projected annual income, using 1916 as a guiding year. Although the reality was that no one knew just how much money would be needed in total. Various estimates ranged between three and fifteen billion dollars annually as the minimum amount of funds necessary. In any case, the total amount of necessary money would be an almost unprecedented sum for the United States. Kitchin's proposed revenue bill included four means of increased taxation to fund the war: individual and corporate income taxes, estate and inheritance taxes, a tax on manufacturers of munitions and war supplies, and miscellaneous taxes.⁴

³ W. Elliot Brownlee, *Federal Taxation in America* (New York: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1996), 16-27; F. W. Taussig, *The Tariff History of the United States* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1967), 164-170.

⁴ United States House of Representatives, *Report of To Increase the Revenue, and for Other Purposes*, 64th Congress, 1st session, 1916, H. Report 922: 1-10; Brownlee, *Federal Taxation*, 20-27; Link, *Campaigns*, 61-65; *Congressional Record*, 64th Congress, 1st Session, 1916, 756-801; *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 1555-1557.

A graduated income tax on individuals and corporations promised to bring in the most revenue. As with any new tax, these revenues were not universally appreciated by the public. And corporate taxes posed a problem for policymakers who did not want to stifle production. The proposed estate taxes were also graduated and expected to bring in about seventeen billion dollars in 1917. The tax on munitions manufacturers included sales on any product considered an implement for war such as guns, cartridges, gunpowder, and explosives. That total would bring in over seventy-one billion dollars. The miscellaneous category placed a tax on services, special and luxury industries such as pawnbrokers, bowling alleys, tobacco, circuses, and similar establishments.⁵

The new taxes alone would not fulfill the government's total need for money. Other sources would be needed as well. Treasury Secretary William McAdoo initially wanted about 50 percent of the necessary war revenue to come from taxes, but after discussions with Kitchin and others, McAdoo insisted that overtaxing would stifle any expansion of industry. Instead, he asked the Ways and Means Committee to bring in one-third of the total needed funds from taxes. The other two-thirds would need to come from other sources. The answer was the sale of "Liberty Bonds." Liberty Loan drives were the biggest source of income designed to finance the war. Beginning in 1917, the federal government sought to raise funds from private American citizens to finance America's involvement in the Great War. Kitchin tried to put the burden of payment on those who stood to benefit most from it, such as the munitions manufacturers, but Secretary

⁵ *An Act to Increase the Revenue, and for Other Purposes*, 756-801; Charles Gilbert, *American Financing of World War I* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1970), 1-10.

McAdoo convinced Wilson otherwise. The borrowing effort was called the “Liberty Loan” and made possible through the sale of Liberty Bonds. Most of the bonds were priced too high for average workers to be able to afford them, but the government soon issued “War Thrift Stamps” at much lower rates to include even poorer Americans in the sales.⁶

There were incentives to buy bonds. The government paid interest on them bi-annually (see figure 3). In total, the federal government instituted five loan drives between 1917 and 1919. In North Carolina, millions of dollars were raised for the war effort. The largest amount for the state through the whole war came in October 1917, with over five million dollars raised. The large sale of bonds throughout the country can, in part, be attributed to the Committee on Public Information, which ran a propaganda campaign to help sell the bonds, but also conducted efforts to “sell the war” to the public. Thousands of advertisements were plastered on billboards and streetcars nationwide to sell the American people on the war. In all, the federal government raised more than seventeen billion dollars through the bonds and stamps, which met its initial goal that two-thirds of the total amount raised to finance the war come from these bonds and the rest from taxes.⁷

⁶ William G. McAdoo, *Crowded Years: The Reminiscences of William G. McAdoo* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931), 372-384; Gilbert, *Financing of World War I*, 1-10; McAdoo to Kitchin, January 2, 1917, Box 16, Kitchin Papers.

⁷ Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 77-96, 211-219; Matthew Peak, “North Carolina and the 2nd Liberty Loan Drive,” NCDCCR Blog Post, <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2017/10/31/north-carolina-and-2nd-liberty-loan-drive>. Axelrod’s *Selling the Great War* is the ultimate biography of George Creel, the chairman and face of the Committee on Public Information.

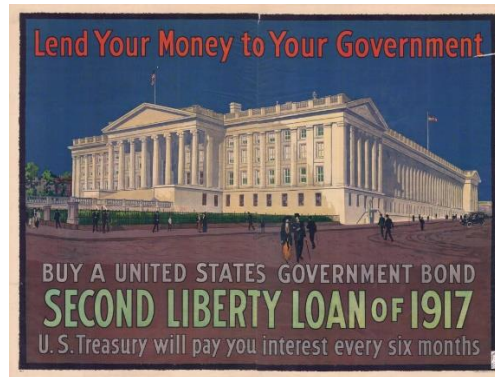


Figure 3. Lend Your Money to Your Government. Posters, Military Collection, State Archives of North Carolina.

Americans needed motivation to purchase bonds and to support the war in general. With that in mind, President Wilson established, via executive order, the Committee on Public Information (CPI). Formed on April 13, 1917, only about a week after the war resolution passed, the CPI was to control the news that Americans would receive concerning American and Allied efforts in the war. “Propaganda” is usually a dirty word in the American vernacular, and George Creel, the chairman of the committee, resisted use of the term to describe the committee’s work. He stressed instead that his panel would use “propaganda not as the Germans defined it,” but rather in the true sense of the word, as a “propagation of faith.” Creel wanted the agency to reach every nook and cranny of the country to carry out Wilson’s “verdict of mankind.” The CPI had to turn a traditionally isolationist and ambivalent country into a nation of ideologically motivated citizens.⁸

⁸ Axelrod, *Selling the Great War*, 119-120, 189-195; George Creel, *Rebel at Large: Recollections of Fifty Crowded Years* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1947), 158.

Creel set up channels for the committee to distribute patriotic information to every American. The committee was committed to reaching Americans as they staged events for different ethnic groups, in their own languages, throughout the country. The committee simultaneously worked with other government agencies and the post office to censor what it considered seditious counterpropaganda. The committee's poster creations are probably the best remembered and were the most effective tools in Creel's arsenal. The committee was ultimately successful in its goals to "sell the war" to the American public. Through its propaganda efforts, the Committee on Public Information helped to convince millions of Americans to do their bit to support the war effort.⁹

Another federal organization, the Council of National Defense, originated from Wilson's preparedness campaign. The passage of the National Defense Act of 1916 established the committee with the purpose of investigating national needs and advising the president, along with certain department secretaries, on any strategic need concerning the war. Another role of the council was to create a unified, centralized, national organization to coordinate support for American involvement in the war effort. The council consisted of the secretaries from the departments of war, the navy, the interior, agriculture, commerce, and labor. The federal government held a conference on May 2, 1917, to organize state councils of defense around the country, including in North Carolina. Although many states had already established their councils before America declared war, they only began to organize after the official declaration. According to

⁹ Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 116-140, 214-232.

historian William Breen, southern state councils were particularly efficient. For example, in North Carolina, special committees helped drafted men put their business affairs in order before they were expected to leave for training camp. This service extended to both volunteers and drafted men. The Committee on Soldiers' Business Aid performed this task in North Carolina. Government officials in Washington D.C. were so impressed with North Carolina's handling of this matter that the Council of National Defense decided to publicize the state's work on a nationwide basis.¹⁰

The North Carolina Council of Defense met and organized on May 31, 1917. Daniel H. Hill Jr., the son of a relatively famous North Carolina Civil War general, emerged as the natural choice to lead the council. State councils were to cooperate with the federal government as well as with each other to organize and direct any resources of men and materials to defend the country. Like many state councils, North Carolina's had many sub committees. Among them were finance, public information, legal issues, coordination work, sanitation, conservation, industrial survey, historical preservation, labor, military, home defense, transportation, research, woman's work, and soldiers' business aid. These mirrored their federal counterparts in many instances.¹¹

Many of these division's purposes were self-evident. The finance division facilitated donations from "generous citizens," because during the entire duration of

¹⁰ Breen, *Uncle Sam*, 102; Matthew Peek, "Profiles from the Archives: North Carolina Council of Defense," NCDCCR Blog, May 31, 2017. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2017/05/31/profiles-archives-north-carolina-council-defense>.

¹¹ Hal Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), xii-xix; *North Carolina Council of Defense Plan of Organization* (1917), North Carolina Council of Defense Records, WWI Papers, Military Collection, State Archives of North Carolina, 1-9; Matthew Peek, "North Carolina Council of Defense," NCDCCR Blog.

military involvement in the war, the North Carolina General Assembly was not in session, which also meant that council members were not paid for their efforts. The committee on public information was the propaganda wing. The coordination work division facilitated inter-council cooperation. Sanitation organized healthy living and medical practices generally to make sure potential soldiers, or young men, were able-bodied. The conservation, labor, and industrial survey wings helped establish the best practices for both industry and farmers. Historical preservation recorded the names of all North Carolinians in service who were involved in the preparedness effort. Home defense was tasked with creating the last line of defense in the state, as most militia units were likely to be needed elsewhere when the war came.¹²

As with many governmental functions, the bulk of the work done by the North Carolina state council happened on the local level. Each county in North Carolina had an appointed chairman who would organize county committees based on the statewide model. These local actions were most evident with the local Soldiers' Business Aid Committees, which helped draftees and volunteers deal with legal matters, such as the writing of a will, and helped soldiers fill out absentee ballot voting cards so that they could maintain participation in politics. The county boards did most of the work to organize fund-raising drives and assist with draft boards. These county-based committees did their best to help North Carolinians on the home front.¹³

¹² *Council of Defense Pamphlet*, 5-9; "Federal Control Newsprint Paper," *Wilmington Dispatch*, July 12, 1917.

¹³ Joseph Hyde Pratt, "History of the North Carolina Council of Defense, 1917-1920," Unpublished WWI Papers, Military Collection, State Archives of North Carolina, 1932, 8-35; "Reports Show Red Cross Fund Oversubscribed," *Williamston Enterprise*, June 29, 1917; "Men on the Liability List," *Smithfield Herald*, July 24, 1917; "Selective Draft Put into Effect," *Hertford County Herald*, July 27, 1917.

While the federal government sought the best methods to finance America's involvement in the World War, North Carolinians were well-suited to benefit economically. Local businesses, farmers, industries in the state, and workers could see the possibilities in front of them. Before the United States became involved, the European war brought economic benefits to many Americans. Indeed, there was actually some initial excitement in North Carolina for a potential economic boon. The United States was in a position to profit not just from agricultural exports to Europe, but also, every "idle dollar" in the United States could go to work in the production of all types of materials that the Old-World belligerents would need. One North Carolina man expressed his hopes in an editorial written in 1914, in which he explained how easily North Carolina could benefit from tipping the trade balance in the favor of the United States.¹⁴

Alas, these early hopes proved forlorn, as trade with Europe fell immediately after the war began. The initial result was a severe decline in southern cotton exports, especially to one of the leading buyers, Great Britain. Southern members of Congress were seriously concerned about the economic impact of the war on important cash crops such as tobacco and cotton. Democratic Senator Furnifold Simmons of North Carolina was quite pessimistic about the situation in the early years of the war. He foresaw a surplus that would glut the domestic market and drive down prices far enough to cause an economic disaster for southern growers. Those poor forecasts from southern congressional leaders only became grimmer as the war dragged on. Due to the state's

¹⁴ "General News," *Raleigh News and Observer*, October 11, 1914; Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York: Harper, 1954), 149; "Good Bye to a Dear Old Friend," *The Monroe Journal*, September 1, 1914.

economic links, the southern cash crop problem was really a national problem. In late 1914, *The Washington Post* lamented that if foreign buyers could not buy American cash crops, the entire economy might collapse.¹⁵

The first months of the war produced fear and confusion. Great Britain halted exports to Germany, which had bought Americans goods and southern cotton for decades. However, the British were more concerned with maintaining good relations with the United States than they were with preventing the Germans from obtaining cotton. Given this fact, at least for the first year of the war, American cotton was excluded from the blockade. When the British finally did enact the full blockade, Wilson saw it as a violation of American neutrality but could do little to fight it. In his defense of American neutrality, Kitchin would also point to the fact that Britain's blockade hurt America's economy as much as Germany ever did.¹⁶

Indeed, tobacco and cotton growers in North Carolina pleaded for government aid in late 1914, and while President Wilson was "deeply impressed by the plight of cotton growers," very little was done for them. Elected representatives claimed to be on the side of the farmers, but there were no giant legislation or aid packages passed for them. Kitchin, along with many southern representatives, spent a lot of their political energy fighting tariffs for the benefit of farmers. The initial trade decline did not last very long though, and Louisiana's Senator John Thornton noted only a year later that after an

¹⁵ *Congressional Record*, 63rd Congress, 2nd Session, 1914, 13441; *Washington Post*, October 5, 1914.

¹⁶ Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 40, 310; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality, 1914-1915* (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 1960), 6-18.

unavoidable deficit in 1914, there was a splendid new outlook for business and people in the South.¹⁷

After the shaky financial outlook in the early months of the European war, the United States and North Carolina stood to prosper from the conflict, especially in the agricultural sector. North Carolina, like many American states in the early twentieth century, was largely agricultural. In 1910 for example, 71.9 percent of the state was deemed farmland, with an average statewide value of \$15.29 per acre. There was an increase of about twenty-nine thousand farms in North Carolina between 1900 and 1910, and that number increased even more by the time the war ended in 1920. The total value of farm property, including land, buildings, machines, and livestock was in excess of \$530 million, an increase of 130 percent since 1900. Land value alone increased by about 141 percent. It became evident that North Carolina farmers were well suited to contribute much produce to hungry Europeans, as well as provide the cigarettes that soldiers would rely on in the trenches.¹⁸

As a predominantly agriculture state, produce was the biggest potential money maker for North Carolina. The Tar Heel state was actually on the verge of an agricultural revolution in the early decades of the twentieth century. A North Carolina newspaper editor and author, Bion H. Butler, declared that in the twentieth century cotton was still king in the South, as it had been for over 120 years since the invention of Eli Whitney's

¹⁷ Bion H. Butler, "Lee County Will Find a Farm For You, Or it Will Make One," *Farmer and Mechanic*, March 30, 1915; Annette Cox, "Towels, Socks, and Denim: World War I and North Carolina's Cotton Mills" in *North Carolina's Experience during the First World War*, eds. Shepherd W. McKinley and Steven Sabol (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018), 295-296.

¹⁸ *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Statistics for North Carolina*, 619-624.

cotton gin. However, he continued, 1914 was no longer the time of kings. Butler suggested that corn and other grain crops might be the wave of the future for the southern states, although cotton was still the most lucrative cash crop in North Carolina, despite its falling price. Butler claimed that North Carolina was uniquely equipped to grow corn, as opposed to the “traditional” corn-growing states from the Mid-west, such as Ohio and Kansas. He reasoned that North Carolina had better and more frequent rainfalls that yielded more crop per harvest than midwestern states could produce. Butler also envisioned that with over ten million European men at war by October 1914, the world would look to the United States, and North Carolina, to feed it.¹⁹

Butler was right about North Carolina’s potential as a “corn basket” for the world. The state’s corn and grain production increased by about 112 percent in the decade preceding the Great War, with a total value of thirty-one million dollars in 1909. Then, by 1919, the last year of the war, North Carolina produced almost eighty million dollars’ worth of corn. Obviously, price increases accounted for some of the growth in value, given that there were very few farmers left to farm in most of Europe. The Old North State did not completely supersede those “traditional” corn-growing states of the American Midwest, but the increased demand and prices definitely benefitted Tar Heel farmers.²⁰

Aside from staple food crops, tobacco and cotton were among the most important cash crops in North Carolina. Tobacco production totaled roughly \$14 million in 1910

¹⁹ Bion H. Butler, “North Carolina on Verge of Agricultural Revolution,” *Farmer and Mechanic*, October 13, 1914; *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Statistics for North Carolina*, 631; *Papers of Bickett*, “The Cotton Situation,” 146.

²⁰ *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, State Compendium for North Carolina*, 68.

but had exploded to a value of over \$151 million by the close of the decade. Before the World War, tobacco agricultural techniques in North Carolina were archaic, which may help explain why the farmers were so concerned in the early months of the war. For most planters, farming tobacco was a path to poverty due to antiquated farming techniques and technologies. Despite initial fears, the war induced a small innovation boom that was needed to make tobacco production a more lucrative venture for southern farmers, although the true boom would not erupt until after the Second World War. Cotton production and manufacturing proved to be another great source of success in North Carolina during the war years. Tar Heel cotton mills produced a diverse assortment of finished goods for export including towels, socks, and denim, all of which were desperately needed in Europe. After textile manufacturers took a cautious initial approach, cotton prices improved enough that the industry began thriving. When Senator Thornton of Louisiana saw a “splendid outlook” for business, he may as well have specifically mentioned tobacco and cotton among the many American ventures that produced wealth for North Carolina.²¹

In fact, it was the Great War that turned cigarette smoking from a dirty habit for seedy men and an activity reserved for the underclasses into a manly activity and a sign of masculine vigor. People smoked cigarettes before the war, but the war turned Americans into cigarette smokers according to historian Evan Bennett. It also made North Carolina’s tobacco production more vital than ever. With the changing nature of

²¹ Evan P. Bennett, *When Tobacco Was King: Families, Farm Labor, and Federal Policy in the Piedmont* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 35-61; Cox, “Towels, Socks, and Denim,” 295-299.

the cigarette and increased demand, there was a true boom in the cigarette market, with many farmers switching their dominant crop from cotton to tobacco.²²

One of the earliest indicators in North Carolina of the coming World War was an idea that America might be able to create its own “army” of pint-sized farmers. The United States Bureau of Education had a peacetime goal in mind when it initially suggested training the country’s ten million school children to build and maintain their own small home gardens, but that idea quickly shifted to a wartime notion in 1914. The gardens tended by elementary schoolers would be “invaluable in supplying food to cities” in the event that millions of American farm boys would be called off to fight in Europe. Tar Heels foresaw the strife and hunger in Europe, and in some cases, odd suggestions, such as employing the nation’s children as substitute bread-makers, were created to alleviate any fears about this kind of creative solution. The suggestion of school-aged farming children was seen in the newspapers only about one month after the new governor Thomas Bickett issued a proclamation urging residents of North Carolina to plant war gardens in anticipation of the war’s effect on the state. This call was not that unusual since Governor Bickett was known as the agricultural governor of North Carolina. So, when he issued a proclamation in March 1917 that encouraged farmers to plant war gardens, even on a small scale at home, and coupled with the establishment of

²² Evan P. Bennett, “Tobacco Agriculture and the Great War” in *North Carolina’s Experience during the First World War*, eds. Shepherd W. McKinley and Steven Sabol (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018), 287-294; Alan Brandt, *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 45-53.

the North Carolina Food Conservation Commission on April 17 1917, these suggestions fell in line with his overall goals.²³

Bickett's tenure as governor coincided with America's involvement in the war. Therefore, his advocacy of agricultural reforms stemmed from wartime need, even though the war hindered many of his other domestic reform programs. Bickett proved an able leader. He had previously served as the state's attorney general for the prior two governors, including under William Walton Kitchin. Like many of the other prominent North Carolinians in politics, he spent his early career as a lawyer. He attended Wake Forest College, like the Kitchins, and later studied law at the University of North Carolina. As governor, his interest in agriculture grew out of his concern for rural North Carolinians and the low standard of life outside of the cities around the state. His administration enacted measures to promote agricultural instruction in those rural areas. Involvement in war tends to have a peculiar influence on domestic activity. In this case, the need for food to supply armies fighting in Europe provided the impetus needed to guide the governor's wishes, although the results were short-lived.²⁴

Nearly three quarters of North Carolinians still lived in rural areas in 1914, and agriculture remained the state's most prominent industry. However, the food situation was serious when the United States finally declared war. Governor Bickett's plan to help

²³ "Move for Home Gardens," *Polk County News*, May 7, 1915; Sellie Robert Winters, "Food Conservation in North Carolina," *Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/winters/menu.html>; William J. Breen, *Uncle Sam at Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism, and the Council of National Defense, 1917-1919* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), 6.

²⁴ "Thomas Bickett," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: Volume 1 A-C*, ed. Nathaniel F. Magruder (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 149-151; *Papers of Bickett*, v; Sandra Sue Horton, "The Political Career of Thomas Walter Bickett" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1965).

the state's rural farmers coincided with a dire situation. There were food shortages in Europe, obviously due to millions of farmers putting on uniforms rather than tilling their fields. In North Carolina, bad weather caused a small but not insignificant food shortage during the first few years of the war. The worldwide demand for food was at an all-time high because of the war, but farming was not as personally lucrative as the potential of manufacturing work in the cities. Many young men from rural areas fled their family farms for higher-paying work in the cities. In light of these circumstances, the federal government, in conjunction with the states, made plans to turn farming into a patriotic duty. And to meet these plans, an annual gathering of North Carolina's best and brightest agricultural minds shifted its focus.²⁵

In the 1910s North Carolina State College hosted the state's Farmers' and Farm Women's Convention, gatherings that played some role in wartime food production. Before 1917, these conventions had promoted better farming practices and techniques. However, when it became clear that the United States would probably be drawn into the war, their purpose shifted from promoting cash crops toward encouraging the food production so vital to American and Allied soldiers. The convention also provided programs that focused on the best practices for food conservation. For example, some of the programs arranged demonstrations on extending the shelf life of milk by turning it into cottage cheese, which was considered a meat substitute. This goal fell in line with

²⁵ Todd Kosmerick, "World War I and Agriculture," Libraries News, Special Collections Blog Post, entry posted August 18, 2017, <https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/news/special-collections/world-war-i-and-agriculture>.

the newly established U.S. Food Administration's objective of conserving food, meat especially, for American soldiers (see Figure 4).²⁶



Figure 4. Be Patriotic.

The principal mechanism for food conservation was the United States Food Administration which Wilson established, via executive order, shortly after Congress declared war on Germany. It was a largely decentralized organization run by Herbert Hoover, who was already relatively famous around the country due to his efforts to help provide relief and aid in Belgium after 1914 as the Director of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium (CRB). North Carolina did its bit to help with Belgian relief efforts. Governor Locke Craig issued a proclamation imploring the state to donate extra clothing to the “destitute inhabitants in Belgium.” The Food Administration’s goals were to stimulate food production and conservation, control food prices, and even create

²⁶ Martin L. Fausold, *The Presidency of Herbert Hoover* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985), introduction.

²⁷ Poster, Records of the United States Food Administration, 1917-1920, National Archives, College Park, MD, Electronic Archive, <https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/sow-seeds/images/be-patriotic.gif>. The Food Administration produced numerous posters to promote conservation and production.

surpluses for America's allies. The Administration was short lived, and it did not survive long after the war ended, but it was useful in securing its war aims.²⁸

North Carolina responded to the federal Food Administration by establishing the North Carolina Food Conservation Commission, headed by Henry Page as state food administrator and John Lucas as executive secretary. This commission emphasized a voluntary campaign around the state that encouraged Tar Heels to "feed yourself." Even before the declaration of war, Governor Bickett called on North Carolinians to double the production of their home gardens in order to conserve food when the time came. The governor asked every woman in the state to sign a "food pledge card" to observe certain rules and regulations concerning food conservation. The campaign succeeded, and apart from typical food-producing farms, around fifty-six thousand gardeners cultivated their own plots around the state. Each county in the state had its own food administrator appointed to coordinate the effort. The notion of an American army of "pint-sized farmers" never truly took effect, but school children across North Carolina pulled their weight by organizing corn, pork, and poultry clubs.²⁹

North Carolina's children were also called on to participate in conservation and other patriotic efforts. In December 1917, public schools across the state devoted the

²⁸ William C. Mullendore, *History of the United States Food Administration, 1917-1919* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1941), 70; May F. Jones, ed., *Public Letters and Papers of Locke Craig: Governor of North Carolina, 1913-1917* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company State Printers, 1916), 140; George H. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Master of Emergencies, 1917-1918* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), x.

²⁹ "Food Conservation," *Papers of Bickett*, 127; Sellie Robert Winters, "Food Conservation in North Carolina," *American Review of Reviews* 56 (November 1917): 504; *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, State Compendium for North Carolina*, 68-70; *Program for North Carolina Day*, 21; Michael Siström, "North Carolina and the Great War: The Impact of World War I on the Tar Heel State," *Documenting the American South*, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/homeintro.html>.

annual North Carolina Day to teaching students about thrift, conservation, and patriotism. The state superintendent, James Y. Joyner, noted that it was the patriotic duty of every teacher in the state to make the day “a splendid patriotic rally for increasing the loyalty, zeal, and enthusiasm” of all students. He directed school rooms to be decorated in national colors, with many American flags, and “if possible,” the flags of Allied nations. If those flags and colored decorations could not be easily and cheaply obtained, young girls were encouraged to do their bit and make them by hand. And, of course, parents were encouraged to participate as much as possible in the day’s festivities.³⁰

The program issued in anticipation of the celebration included a copy of the *Star-Spangled Banner*, numerous sing-along lyrics about American allies, and a detailed description of “the meaning of the flag” written by President Wilson to stir up patriotic feelings. It also offered suggestions for thrift and conservation. The school-aged audience was informed of the vital role that the United States would play, and was already playing, as the breadbasket, or corn basket, of her allies. They were also reminded that with twenty million able-bodied European men at arms, their respective countries were expected to go without, or with much less. There was an obligatory reminder that as troublesome as it might be to do with less in the United States, the situation would not be nearly as bad as that of the Allied nations in Europe. “Food will win the war,” the program reminded readers, “produce it” and “save it!” The only mandatory rationing that

³⁰ *Program for North Carolina Day*, December 14, 1917, issued from the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2-10, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/ncday1917/ncday.html>.

ever took place in North Carolina, however, was with sugar, and this action did not happen until the final months of the war.³¹

Holidays represented another opportunity to prepare North Carolinians for the approaching involvement in the European war. Independence Day was a natural fit to promote patriotism, nationalism, and many of the programs important to readying North Carolinians for war. Local government meetings were encouraged to develop ideas to make Tar Heels feel the national spirit of patriotism for the Independence Day holiday in 1917. The state defense council urged those in charge of planning festivities to emphasize the “greatness” of the war. In Greensboro, and elsewhere around the state, battle reenactments were performed that featured patriotic celebrations in connection with the holiday. These celebrations also encouraged food and fuel conservation practices, which would be necessary for the war effort.³²

Food conservation was generally easy in North Carolina. No one was asked to give up too much, or for too long, compared to those in Europe and even the northeastern United States. Fuel conservation followed the same track, partly due to the state’s climate. Obviously, less fuel is necessary in a place where winter snows are generally mild. “Cut wood, cut wood, and cut more wood. This is my appeal to the people of North Carolina,” wrote Governor Bickett in a proclamation to the state to encourage Tar Heels to conserve oil and coal for the war effort. Alexander McAlister headed the state Fuel Administration, and he was later succeeded by R. M. Norfleet. The winter of 1917-18

³¹ *Program for North Carolina Day*, 18-20.

³² “American Nation Gloriously Marks Fourth of July,” *Wilmington Dispatch*, July 4, 1917.

was particularly cold in the northern part of the country, and in combination with a few other factors, weather led to the closure of non-war industries, including many factories in North Carolina. Ordinary citizens were encouraged to burn wood instead of coal to do their bit for conservation. The state fuel administration also issued a short pamphlet to explain the best practices for conserving coal and gas.³³

One unintended, but probably expected, consequence of American entry into the Great War was a farm labor shortage. Young North Carolinians were being drafted into the army, which caused some of the problem. However, if not drafted, many left rural farming areas anyway for higher-paying industrial jobs in large cities. The labor shortage did not quell higher production needs, however. The answer for more food with fewer farmworkers was technology. Tractors were not yet a fixture of North Carolina farms before the Great War, and it took education to make them such. The benefits of moving from literal horsepower to mechanical power were numerous. Fewer farmworkers were needed to move a tractor than a horse, which helped the labor issue. No fodder was needed to feed a tractor, and the savings could be turned into human food. The ratio of food saved versus fuel consumed by machinery created a small problem, but the benefits of a tractor were clear.³⁴

To overcome labor shortages during the war some business owners began hiring people who were traditionally excluded from textile mills and other operations, such as African Americans. Some historians have called this development a missed opportunity,

³³ "On Conserving Fuel," *Papers of Bickett*, 91; *Fuel Conservation. Twelve Questions and Answers*, issued from the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Carolina Collection, 1-7, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/fuel/menu.html>.

³⁴ Kosmerick, "World War I and Agriculture."

as these changes did not last longer than the war itself did. William Link, for example, concluded that white supremacist ideology prevented any long-lasting changes from taking place. But it did seem that the state took a small step forward in the long civil rights movement during the Great War. While race relations failed to move in a positive direction, the state's manufacturing capabilities improved, partially due to the integration of minority workers in the factories.³⁵

Even before the United States entered the Great War, manufacturing related to wartime activities was on the rise across North Carolina. In addition to some of the larger shipbuilders in the United States, North Carolinians pulled their weight in new shipyards established in Wilmington, Beaufort, and Morehead City. Shipyards were another destination for the exodus of young farm boys seeking a place to earn higher wages. Although North Carolina's shipbuilding industry is more often associated with the Second World War, there was a surge in this sector of manufacturing associated with the First World War. The Tar Heel state also excelled at producing projectiles and airplane propellers.³⁶

While these wartime industries thrived, individual businesses in North Carolina also benefitted. War has an unusual way of helping certain businesses, though which ones is never predictable, with some failing and others succeeding. For example, one quintessentially North Carolinian soft drink, and business, owes its success to the Great

³⁵ William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 248-256.

³⁶ Powell, *North Carolina*, 460; Jessica Bandel, "Building Ships for the Government," NCDCCR Blog, September 21, 2017, <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2017/09/21/building-ships-government>.

War. The Carolina Beverage Company ran up against high sugar prices due to war preparation conservation efforts, even before the United States entered the war, and needed to find a more cost-effective product to stay in business. Company owner Lewis Peeler and his partners experimented with many different types of sugar substitute sweeteners before settling on a wild cherry flavor, and Cheerwine was born. Tar Heels were desperate for a sweet-tasting drink without having to pay excess prices for high-sugared drinks, and the company was very successful.³⁷

With men needed elsewhere for the war effort, women's roles in North Carolina began to change. The main job of women in the early twentieth century was first and foremost as wives and mothers. The United States always had a strong affection for the idea of "republican motherhood," but times of war expanded the woman's sphere more than ever. "For girls must work that men may fight," read a poster published by the Young Women's Christian Association. As much as ever, class distinguished where women exerted their influence on society. Working-class women had long toiled side-by-side with their husbands on the farms and in factories while middle and upper-class women managed homes and familial finances, but the war helped to change these patterns, as all Tar Heel women "did their bit."³⁸

Millions of women from around the country supported the war effort when they were called. Most female volunteers became nurses, sewed bandages, or simply drove

³⁷ Jimmy Tomlin, "The History of Cheerwine," *Our State Magazine*, July 31, 2013, <https://www.ourstate.com/history-of-cheerwine/>; Jessica Bandel, "War Gives Rise to Beloved Beverage," NCDCCR Blog, August 24, 2017, <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2017/08/24/war-gives-rise-beloved-beverage>.

³⁸ "For Girls Must Work That Men May Fight: Y.W.C.A." (poster) United States: War Work Council, 1914-1918, North Carolina Collection, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/41869/menu.html>.

food conservation efforts. The United States did not seem prepared to use the full force of its womanpower even after entering the war, with the exception of the American navy, which was the first to harness their full potential. However, the several thousand women who ended up serving in the navy and army had no rank or benefits typically associated with military service. The army never accepted female doctors despite the obvious need. Nevertheless, hundreds made their own way to France to serve.³⁹

Most American women did not go to Europe or join the military, but their contribution to the war effort was still felt. In addition to any duties they had with work or in the home, they put together care packages for soldiers, grew their own food, and especially raised funds through Liberty Bond drives. One of the more common ways for women to serve the effort was to join a group or club. Both men and women in the Progressive period had a fondness for clubs. Before achieving suffrage, the most visible way for women to participate in a democratic society was through a group or club. Many women volunteered to help through their churches or through local and national women's clubs. Even before the United States entered the World War, women had begun participating in the war effort through these kinds of organization, by raising relief money for Belgians or refugees around Europe.⁴⁰

The Red Cross was the most common organization that women joined, as it was one of the largest groups that utilized female labor, and it also crossed international

³⁹ Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I: They Also Served* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1997), ix-x.

⁴⁰ Angela Robbins, "Doing Their Bit: North Carolina's Women on the Homefront" in *North Carolina's Experience during the First World War*, eds. Shepherd W. McKinley and Steven Sabol (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018), 247-259; Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 87-88.

boundaries. Five chapters sprung up across North Carolina, some before and some after America officially entered the war. The first chapter in the state opened in Wilmington in 1908, but its purpose at that point was limited, and women who joined only received basic first aid training. When the war broke out in 1914, the organization began to grow, and when it became clearer that the United States might actually be drawn in, the Red Cross began growing substantially. The State Normal and Industrial College (now known as the University of North Carolina Greensboro) boasted the largest chapter membership in the state, with 263 members at its zenith. “Have you answered the Red Cross Christmas Roll Call?” asked a Red Cross recruiting poster seen around the campus.⁴¹

Women’s groups in nearly every county around the state also supported the war effort by creating care packages, organizing events for military camps in the state, and attempting to raise morale in general. One of these groups created a poem book that expressed their feelings concerning their fathers, sons, husbands, and brothers serving overseas, but the book also tried to explain their own roles as contributors to the effort. One poem explained that women were sacrificing at home in roles just as important as their menfolk would soon be undertaking. That particular poem was met with some resistance, but women were clearly demanding recognition.⁴²

⁴¹ Bandel, *North Carolina*, 44-45; Harrison Fisher, “Have You Answered the Red Cross Christmas Roll Call?” Poster, 1918, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, University of North Carolina at Greensboro Libraries.

⁴² *Oxford Woman’s Poetry Booklet War Lyrics*, December 1918, North Carolina County War Records, WWI Papers. Military Collection, State Archives of North Carolina; Matthew Peek, “1918 Oxford Woman’s Club War Lyrics Booklet,” NCDCCR Blog, April 10, 2018. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2018/04/10/1918-oxford-woman%E2%80%99s-club-war-lyrics-booklet>

Women's colleges in particular served as recruiting centers where North Carolina's girls could join in the war effort. The Red Cross recruited at many women's colleges, but a young woman did not need to join that group to participate. Colleges became training grounds for food conservation practices, as well as industrial training centers. To ease the labor shortage caused by so many men going off to serve, college-aged women volunteered to take on "men's work." They became "farmerettes" and "carpenterettes" after being trained by the Young Christian Women's Association (YWCA) or Women's Land Army of America (WLAA). For the whole duration of the war, women's colleges in North Carolina served as the vanguard of home front efforts in North Carolina.⁴³

Majority Leader Kitchin recognized the seriousness of the moment after America officially entered the war. He agreed that the will of the majority should be followed. He helped to pass bills that would fund the American war effort and always took efforts to keep the greatest burden of the cost off of those who could least afford it. And although Kitchin worked to protect the average American, the state of North Carolina stood to benefit from increased demands for goods and food needed for the war effort. The question left to answer was how best the United States and North Carolina could muster an efficient and effective army and navy to fight in the war.

⁴³ Jessica Bandel, *North Carolina and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History: 2017), 52-53.

CHAPTER VI

NORTH CAROLINA FIGHTS THE WAR, 1917-1918

I have done everything in my power to keep our country out of war, but we are in it – and it now becomes our duty to give our country and the Government our loyal support and efforts in every way, in order to hasten the day of peace.

--Claude Kitchin to W. R. Johnson, April 17, 1917

In the early twentieth century, new ideas about modern war challenged America's longstanding notions of military organization. The federal government created policies based on these new ideas to get the country ready for war. Conscription, it would seem, became the only efficient way to create a modern army in the industrialized world, and it was largely up to the individual American states to implement the federal government's draft policies. Historian John Chambers detailed the federal efforts "to raise an army" and explained how it was organized. Of course, there was resistance to the draft from several sectors of the country. North Carolina responded to America's entry to the war similarly to the rest of the forty-seven states. The Tar Heel state showed very little support for joining the war before the official declaration in April 1917 and only a little more immediately after. Governor Thomas Bickett and other state officials supported the Wilson Administration and tried to get the state "on board" as best as they could. Claude Kitchin acceded and reluctantly supported the war effort. Gradually, North Carolinians did what was asked of them and the state went to war.

A pamphlet issued to North Carolina's school children shortly after the United States entered the war in 1917 explained, as best as it could, why the war started and why America was drawn in. "Many things, some of which it would take a long time to explain, helped bring on this war," noted Robert D. W. Connor, North Carolina's state archivist. He was correct to note that it would take a long time to explain those reasons. Connor wrote a question-and-answer template for teachers to help their students understand the causes of the war. The questions were accusatory of Germany and full of finger-pointing at the German Kaiser, no doubt to elicit patriotic feelings in the young American audience. The prepared questions noted that militarism, alliances, "ruthless" submarine warfare, and imperialism all contributed to the war. But chiefly, the murder of "an Austrian prince, heir to the Austrian throne" gave the "German Emperor his excuse for declaring war."¹

The standard lecture on the origins of the Great War includes nationalism as one of the main underlying causes of the war. A relatively new term at the turn of the twentieth century, it had been gaining traction in Western nations for only about a century, since the time of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and America. In the early thirteenth century, Robert the Bruce pontificated to his father in *Braveheart* that "men fight for me because if they do not, I throw them off my lands and starve their wives and children." As an anecdote, that type of sentiment held true for thousands of years as the major reason that men were willing to fight and potentially die: they had to! There have

¹ *Program for North Carolina Day*, December 14, 1917, 10-15, Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill *Documenting the American South* (project) <https://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/ncday1917/menu.html>.

been professional armies at various times in different places throughout world history but, on the whole, peasants usually fought for their lord or sovereign but rarely for their country.

That notion began to change with the foundations of very modern nation-states in the West. Nationalism and patriotism burst onto the social scene as an obligation of the people. To be good citizens of a Western nation, women had to be willing to sacrifice the lives of their husbands and beaus, while those men had to be willing to offer themselves willingly to the state. This idea spread throughout the United States and Europe during the late nineteenth century. In North Carolina, images that invoked American patriotism, such as the Liberty Bell, a bald eagle, and the year 1776, were plastered on the front pages of newspapers. But, of course, the United States was a little different in the way that Americans expressed their nationalism. There were still many hard feelings against the federal government in the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many southerners remembered, or heard from parents and grandparents, as was the case with Kitchin, about the “evil” federal government during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Cap’n Buck of the Confederate Army would have been one of the North Carolinians to tell his children about the “War of Southern Independence,” rather than the Civil War. Claude Kitchin routinely referred to “the War between the States” later in life. Thus, nationalism was not a universal truth in the United States, as it may have been in Germany after their Wars of Unification or France after the Franco-Prussian War.²

² C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 1-22; Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Wurttemberg, Imperial Germany, and*

For that reason, many historians have argued that it was the Great War that installed a new national purpose into Americans. The Great War created modern Americans through patriotism and nationalism. Historian Christopher Capozzola argued that the “Selective Service Act of 1917 was the centerpiece of wartime citizenship and its defining obligation.” In other words, to be a good citizen of the United States in 1917, every able-bodied male not engaged in a wartime-essential industry, the clergy, divinity students, and members of “established” religious denominations holding “well-recognized” objections to war, needed to volunteer his lot in order to be a full citizen. This departure from centuries of precedent was influenced by the early model of what it meant to be a man or be manly around the turn of the twentieth century, ideals popularized by Theodore Roosevelt and the heroic idealism of the Rough Riders. President Wilson argued that the selective service draft was not really conscription because the United States volunteered as a whole after the declaration of war.³

Claude Kitchin was no stranger to military service himself. His father, Cap’n Buck, served the South during the Civil War, and Kitchin grew up on stories regarding that war. In 1898, when the United States was on the verge of entering a war with Spain, the younger Kitchin held the position of commander of Company B in the First Regiment of the North Carolina State Guard, the successor to the state militia. This organization was established on March 12, 1897, and was made up of volunteers supervised by the

National Memory, 1871-1918 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 61-72; *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 2nd Session, 1918, 661.

³ Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9-21.

state's Adjutant General. Kitchin corresponded often with his commanding officer, Colonel William B. Rodman. Most of Kitchin's comrades complained and were unwilling to be sent to Cuba to fight against the Spanish. North Carolinians, however, saw plenty of action during the Spanish American War. The first American casualty was in fact a Tar Heel, a man named Worth Bagley. However, Kitchin's company never did go to Cuba, and his time in the State Guard was more administrative than active. Kitchin saw no cause for this war other than plain imperialist dreams. As he learned from his father's war stories, so too did Kitchin learn in 1898 that he did not like wars.⁴

Back during the Civil War, fewer than 8 percent of all Union Army soldiers were drafted. Through the wars against western American Indian tribes and the Spanish American War, the American army was made up completely of volunteers. In contrast, during the Great War, about 72 percent of the total of three and a half million servicemen were drafted. On December 15, 1917, the Selective Service Agency prohibited voluntary enlistments by draft-aged men to the army. On August 8, 1918, voluntary enlistment in any service was prohibited. The powers in charge deemed volunteers by that point as inefficient and disruptive. Some prominent Americans saw the prohibition of voluntary enlistments as an inevitable consequence of a modern war. Henry Watterson, editor of a prominent Kentucky newspaper, noted, "The volunteer system, like the stagecoach,

⁴ *History and Traditions: North Carolina National Guard* (Raleigh: Public Affairs Section, The Adjutant General's Department, 1966), 1-15; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction, 15th Anniversary Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 332; "Local News: Some Sharp Replies," *Scotland Neck Commonwealth*, May 5, 1898; Kitchin to Colonel Rodman, March 29, 1898, Box 1, Claude Kitchin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; "The State Guard," *Semi-Weekly Messenger*, March 15, 1898.

served its purpose in primitive times, but like that stagecoach, it proved unequal to the expanding needs of modern time.” In those “primitive times” before the selective service draft was established in 1917, the American preparedness campaigns did not get the United States army ready for a large-scale war, let alone the modern war that featured tanks, machine guns, and airplanes, which America was about to enter.⁵

Prior to the Doughboys showing up in Europe, North Carolinians offered their services to Britain and France chiefly through four organizations: the French Foreign Legion, the American Ambulance Field Service, the Lafayette Escadrille Flying Corps, and the Red Cross. The volunteer lists for all of these, except the Red Cross, remained relatively small, but it seemed that Americans had already chosen a side well before Wilson asked for the declaration. Between 1914 and April 1917, American citizens had to reckon with the government’s policy that it was illegal to serve in a foreign army. And the French military, where all American volunteers would ultimately go, had their own restrictions on foreigners. Ambulance drivers and medical personnel were technically noncombatants, so there was little problem with the American Ambulance Service or the Red Cross. Those who wished to fight and joined the French Foreign Legion circumvented that restriction because they took their oaths of loyalty to the Legion, not to France.⁶

⁵ John W. Chambers, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 73, 299; James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991); Paul D. Escott, *Military Necessity: Civil-Military Relations in the Confederacy* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006).

⁶ Jessica Bandel, *North Carolina and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History: 2017), 10; Charles B. Flood, *First to Fly: The Story of the Lafayette Escadrille, the American Heroes Who Flew for France in World War I* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2015), 1.

Almost as soon as the Austrian government opened its bombardment on Belgrade, two Tar Heel brothers volunteered their services to the French Foreign Legion. Paul and Kiffin Rockwell were both severely wounded in the course of their service to “humanity,” not just to France. After their infantry service was over due to combat wounds, they found new fighting life in the Lafayette Escadrille. Named for the French general who helped Washington defeat the British, the Escadrille comprised Americans who wanted to participate in the war. As part of the squadron, Kiffin Rockwell was credited as the first American to shoot down a German plane in the war. Kiffin did not survive the war and upon his death in the war, his actions were met with praise and admiration. He was called “one of the most fearless aviators of the [Escadrille]” by one admirer. The Rockwell brothers represented a very small minority of the state. They came from a well-educated and privileged background, which allowed them to go off and seek this kind of adventure.⁷

The majority of North Carolinians were unable to offer their service in one of those four organizations and waited until the United States was actually involved before they began to volunteer their service. Obviously, Claude Kitchin fell into this camp. On the passage of the war resolution, Kitchin offered his full, albeit reluctant, support to the war effort. The Majority Leader earnestly believed that in a democracy one was entitled to oppose a course of action until the majority declared its will, at which point one was obligated to adhere to that course. In the closing remarks during his last-gasp effort to

⁷ “American Aviator Killed in War Zone,” *Wilmington Dispatch*, September 24, 1916; “Kiffin Rockwell Killed in Battle,” *Roanoke Beacon*, September 29, 1916; Paul Ayers Rockwell, *War Letters of Kiffin Yates Rockwell: Foreign Legionnaire and Aviator France, 1914-1916* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), xx-xxi.

prevent a declaration he knew he could not stop, Kitchin made clear that he knew his side was the losing one and when the decision for war was made, he would join the majority. “When this Nation, as it doubtless will to-day, speaks the final word through the Congress, I trust I will be found in relation with my Government and my country emulating the example of that son,” he closed to applause from the chamber. To this end, Kitchin was true to his word and literally worked himself to death.⁸

Despite lackluster support from many Tar Heels, North Carolina’s state government, much like every state government around the nation, fully supported the federal government’s war effort. Governor Bickett cooperated with the federal government throughout the war. He called for patriotic displays, called for volunteers to the navy and other branches of military service, defended America’s entry to the war, promoted Liberty Loan drives, and promoted the draft after conscription was passed. On at least one occasion, he travelled to the state’s mountain region to personally persuade deserters and draft dodgers to surrender themselves. The only question for federal government officials, in consultation with the states, was how best to build the military.⁹

The issue of how best to create a national army was one of the great debates that emerged during the preparedness period after Secretary of War Lindley Garrison proposed the creation of a continental army. “America has no army, only a mob, and if war comes tomorrow the American people will be guilty of murder if they send their

⁸ *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1917, 333.

⁹ Nathaniel F. Magruder, “Thomas Walter Bickett,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: Volume 1 A-C*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 149-151; R. B. House, *Public Letters and Papers of Thomas Walter Bickett: Governor of North Carolina, 1917-1921*, comp. by Sanford Martin (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company State Printers, 1923), 119-123.

army to foreign soil” said former president Howard Taft. The ongoing war in Europe, and especially the recent events in Great Britain surrounding conscription, convinced Garrison and other leading military men in the United States that some kind of preparation of the army would be necessary. The British army was made up exclusively of volunteers until the middle of 1916 but their government enacted conscription because the demands for manpower proved to be too much for volunteers alone. The British experience convinced many American officials that some kind of universal training in the United States might be necessary.¹⁰

The question of how best to build a fighting force has always been particularly troublesome for Americans. The first British colonists relied on militia forces made up of volunteers, who one Virginian remarked were “soldiers when they chose to be.” That tradition carried much weight with Americans through almost its entire history. With only a brief, but dramatic, exception during the Civil War, America’s professional army was always made up of volunteers. Between 1863 and 1865, though, the federal and rebel government’s attempts to solicit volunteers and draftees proved difficult, especially in North Carolina. President Wilson respected the American tradition against a coerced military but reluctantly employed the draft at the urging of his advisers. One explanation to ease the selective draft onto the people was the very democratic nature of it. It would

¹⁰ “Congress Takes Up Defense Measures,” *Roanoke Beacon*, December 15, 1916; “Defense Measures,” *Wilmington Dispatch*, March 25, 1917.

bring all men together regardless of class, creed, religious denomination, or ethnicity, although black troops would still be segregated.¹¹

Secretary of War Garrison's continental army plan was intended to create the adequate and professional army needed for the coming war. Garrison and other officials believed that volunteer armies were not enough for a modern war. Of all the belligerent countries involved in the Great War, only Great Britain long maintained a volunteer army. Indeed, when the British parliament proposed conscription for the first time, several British government officials resigned in protest and the country nearly broke out into a collective riot. Every other major European power conscripted millions of men from their own countries, as well as from all of their colonial territories. Some progressive and liberal Americans saw the draft as a European style system of state coercion. The reliance on volunteerism alone was inadequate in Europe, and American leaders were about to figure out that fact too.¹²

Indeed, the American volunteer army that fought during the Mexican border crisis the previous year numbered about two hundred thousand men. Millions more than that would be required to fight in a war that already littered the battlefields of Europe, Asia, and Africa with millions of dead. More than ten million men were recorded as killed, wounded, captured, or missing in the first complete semi-official report from the various belligerent countries in early 1917. To properly enter and compete with those European

¹¹ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 13-19; David Traxel, *Crusader Nation: The United States in Peace and the Great War, 1898-1920* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 277-279.

¹² Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 13-19; "Resign because of Conscription," *Washington Daily News*, January 1, 1916; "General News," *Roanoke News*, January 13, 1916; "New Conscription Bill Passes Its First Reading," *Washington Daily News*, May 5, 1916; Traxel, *Crusader Nation*, 280; *New York Times*, March 13, 1917.

nations, the American government's early estimates deemed over seven hundred thousand men to be the minimum necessary to enter the conflict. At least a few members of the House and Senate would have been old enough to remember the draft riots from the Civil War. Any vote for a conscription bill would make them fear for their political futures if they voted in favor of a draft. Instead, government officials were initially hopeful they could reach the required number of military men through volunteers alone. From North Carolina, this feat would mean augmenting its national guard with an additional five thousand men. Individual citizens, the state government, and the federal government all preferred this option initially. Volunteers could choose their command and branch of service, serve under officers that the volunteers knew, and serve with friends from home, not to mention have the honor of one's name displayed in the local newspaper. Better chances for a promotion also titillated volunteer opportunities. Governor Bickett issued a proclamation acknowledging that "North Carolina will not fail" in this task.¹³

However, early on during the government's recruiting efforts, it became clear that volunteerism alone would not be enough to fill the armed forces. North Carolina did not fail to support Governor Bickett's plea, but the initial enlistments proved inadequate. Federal officials began drafting a new idea to fix this problem, and the Selective Service Act of 1917 became the answer. For the second time in American history there would be a nationwide draft. Many in Congress contended that conscription was unconstitutional,

¹³ *Papers of Bickett*, "Call for Volunteers," 82-83; "Governor's Call For Volunteers," *Hertford County Herald*, June 1, 1917; Bandel, *North Carolina*, 22-23.

but the Supreme Court upheld the law in 1918. Kitchin saw conscription as a violation of American rights. He and several of his colleagues preferred a more “honorable” volunteer army that did not pluck young men from their homes to go fight in an unpopular war. At one point, he suggested to a colleague that those who had clamored for war should go to the front themselves. However, he recognized that a conscription draft would eventually win the day. Kitchin wrote to a concerned constituent, “I shall vote for the volunteer bill. However, conscription will doubtless pass by a big majority.” There was moderate debate in the Senate and House over the conscription bill, but sentiment in favor of the resolution was almost unanimous. Even the long-time champion of rural America, William Jennings Bryan, gave up his fight against conscription when the United States entered the war. The Selective Service Act eventually passed 397 to 24 in the House and 81 to 8 in the Senate.¹⁴

Despite conscription becoming the preferred method of building the military, it was not universally accepted. Kitchin even hypothesized that the majority of his colleagues in Congress disagreed with conscription but “could not get up the courage to go against the influences of the press and the demands of the war officials.” Non-leaders, especially many recent American immigrants became alarmed at the thought of conscription because they recently left countries where forced service was the norm. “Conscription is immoral, unAmerican, and unconstitutional,” one American asserted. He

¹⁴ Jack F. Leach, *Conscription in the United States: Historical Background* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Publishing Co., 1952), vi; Kitchin to Edwin Webb, April 10, 1917, Box 19, Kitchin Papers; Kitchin to D. L. Ryder, April 28, 1917, Box 20, Kitchin Papers; “Rushing War Preparations,” *Mount Airy News*, April 5, 1917; Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 157; Traxel, *Crusader Nation*, 281.

wondered “why in the name of humanity drag us into a war which we disapprove? Conscription is the thin entering wedge of military despotism. Go to Europe and fight Germany if you want to, but do not try to drag us with you.” This sentiment was shared by many North Carolinians. Josephus Daniels wondered why the United States should “introduce Prussianism to fight Prussianism?” Harkening back to the draft riots from the Civil War, many Tar Heels took their displeasure to the streets, in Ashe County for example. Surprisingly, these protests were the aberration, as most of the ten million draft-age American men filled out their draft cards without much grief.¹⁵

Other North Carolinians feared that draft boards might institute favoritism in their selections. This policy was from the federal government, after all, and many southerners in general continued to distrust Uncle Sam. Many believed that draft board members could keep their own sons or close friends from eligibility in the draft. But the federal government was quick to reassure people that the Selective Service Act made it impossible to play favorites. The Provost Marshal General issued a statement to combat these fears. He said, “There is no ground for such a fear” because “the law is specific and allows no latitude to the [local] officials.” Every man was required to register, and the draft calls were randomized, so there was little possibility of fraud from the local boards.¹⁶

¹⁵ Kitchin to Robert W. Winston, May 15, 1917, Box 20, Kitchin Papers; *New York Herald*, June 5, 1917; Bandel, *North Carolina*, 26-27; Capozzola, *Uncle Sam*, 30; Lee A. Craig, *Josephus Daniels: His Life and Times* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 336; Barnet Schecter, *The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America* (New York: Walker & Co., 2005).

¹⁶ “No Favoritism is to be Shown in Registration,” *Mount Airy News*, May 17, 1917; “No Favoritism in Draft,” *Hertford County Herald*, June 1, 1917.

In their initial plans for the draft, the Wilson Administration sought to exempt married men, but this proved problematic with various discrepancies that were allowed. Then the debate over what age range should be included in the draft began. Especially in rural areas, many Americans believed nineteen- and twenty-year-old farm boys were too naïve for war. Eventually, the administration settled that wartime-essential industry employees, the clergy, divinity students, and members of “established” religious denominations holding “well recognized” objections to war would be exempt and all other men between twenty-one and thirty would be included. Kitchin took particular exception to the exemptions established by the Selective Service Act. Like many southerners and representatives of rural areas, Kitchin argued that farmers were just as essential as industrial workers and demanded that their service be exempted or deferred, but he failed to persuade the selective service draft board.¹⁷

Despite the mandatory nature of conscription, the government still had to “sell” the army and navy to the country. The federal government tried to tie registration for the draft to civic duty as much as possible. For example, draft-aged men had to register at their voting poll places, rather than the post office, which is where the regular army did its recruiting. The selective service boards were made up of local officials but not regular military officers. Tactics like these made the mandatory nature of registration seem like a normal civic duty, the same way an American would register to vote. Young men from the Tar Heel state often felt compelled to cast their lot in the selective service draft, not

¹⁷ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 142,155-156; Kitchin to J. Winstead, February 23, 1918, Box 33, Kitchin Papers; Kitchin to L. Barker, February 23, 1918, Box 33, Kitchin Papers.

necessarily due to the legal obligation hoisted on them from the federal government, but because of a newly created social norm, voluntarism. Women might join one of the groups that supported the war effort or simply join a knitting organization to make socks for soldiers' packages. Whether or not those socks ever made their way to a Doughboy is questionable, but the spirit of voluntarism was high, and women felt a sense of accomplishment that they could "knit their bit." Men, on the other hand, had to volunteer themselves for military service, or at least volunteer their lot to the selective service when that came.¹⁸

Newspapers across the country, as well as in North Carolina, reinforced the government's call to voluntarism. One headline read, "Are You A Slacker?" The term "slacker" emerged to explain a person who failed in his or her duty to voluntarism. It is a word typically associated with deserters, but in 1917, it applied to all Americans who did not volunteer. Pressure for conforming to voluntarism, as well as outright repression, helped to suppress opposition nationwide. Except for the possible exceptions of a few politicians such as Eugene Debs or Robert La Follette, there was no national figure to galvanize an anti-volunteer effort, but even those two figures only influenced people already accustomed to them. After the declaration, nearly every major political personality got behind the war effort, including Kitchin, who still opposed the war but had to work with Wilson to help properly conduct it.¹⁹

¹⁸ Capozzola, *Uncle Sam*, 83-90; Traxel, *Crusader Nation*, 281.

¹⁹ "Are You A Slacker?" *Wilmington Dispatch*, September 30, 1917; Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 205.

The notion of voluntarism denotes some sense of consent on the part of the volunteer, as if it was a simple duty, like a person might volunteer time to a local church function. Typically, volunteers are unpaid, and the task is performed out of an obligation. Posters created by the United States War Department made voluntarism seem to be this kind of task (see figure 3). Men and women alike were coerced into volunteering through the government's propaganda efforts, along with what can only be described as shaming from other Americans. This kind of coercion was not needed in totalitarian Russia or Austria, where citizens were often forced into labor or military service. The reality there was, of course, different from the rhetoric used in the United States. While every American was expected to be a volunteer, many did not.²⁰



Figure 5. America Calls Enlist in the Navy

²⁰ Capozzola, *Uncle Sam*, 83-90.

²¹ Joseph Leyendecker, "America Calls-Enlist in the Navy" (Poster), World War I Papers, Military Collection, State Archives of North Carolina, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15012coll10/id/1946/rec/24>. This poster was one of many produced by the U.S. Navy to promote volunteers.

Even though it was only a few months after the president was reelected for keeping “us out of war,” there seemed to be little blame for a broken campaign slogan among potential Tar Heel soldiers. Some were scared of the German imperial possibilities, while others wanted revenge for the sinking of merchant ships and the loss of American life on British liners. Wilson quickly made the Great War a war of ideals and a fight for democracy, and Governor Bickett agreed. The governor toured the state explaining that if Britain and France fell, America would stand alone against German militarism. He acknowledged that there would most likely not be a large-scale amphibious invasion. Most ordinary Tar Heels also recognized that the United States was in no immediate danger of such an invasion and saw the coastal defenses that were already available as among the best in the world to defend the country. Bickett argued though, that the German influence on Central and South America in Mexico, of course, and also in Brazil would be too much for the United States to bear alone. The president used this argument, among others, to turn the World War into a black-and-white struggle, the way Americans preferred their wars, with a clear good side and a clear bad side.²²

Indeed, Wilson remained quite popular around the country. In a newspaper editorial, one American acknowledged what a tremendous task Wilson had dealt with to keep the country out of war before his reelection. Wilson’s stern and uncompromising character spoke to this man who appreciated that very few presidents since James

²² R. Jackson Marshall, *Memories of World War I: North Carolina Doughboys on the Western Front* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1998), 3-5; “Address at the University of North Carolina on Founders’ Day, 1917,” *Papers of Bickett*, 161-162; “United States is in No Danger of an Invasion,” *Washington Daily News*, February 9, 1916; Bandel, *North Carolina*, 22-23.

Monroe had to deal with such an international crisis. The editorialist relished the idea of Wilson becoming the undisputed leader of democracy when the war ended due to what he believed would be the collapse of European world dominance. While this sentiment was not shared by all Americans, many remained hopeful that Wilson and the United States would take on a new role as the democratic world's leader.²³

Nevertheless, many North Carolinians still chose to resist the draft when their number was called. The most common modes of resistance were draft evasion and desertion. These are two different terms. Draft evaders were those men who either did not register, failed to show up when they were called, or never appeared for training. Deserters literally deserted their posts after they arrived for training camps or skipped town and hid from draft enforcers, usually in mountainous areas. Some dramatic cases turned into deadly confrontations, but on the whole, passive evasion was the dominant method. Draftees in rural areas of North Carolina were able to avoid their call to service with systematic ease. Since this military draft was the first one since the Civil War, and the first truly "nationwide" draft, local officials struggled to enforce conscription. There were no federal identity papers or social security numbers to see who was eligible to be drafted. Nor was there a large enough federal bureaucracy to enforce a nation-wide draft. It was much easier to hide away from draft enforcement in the rural areas of North Carolina. Selective service officials reported that about 337,000 men avoided service

²³ "Four Years More of Wilson," *Smithfield Herald*, March 13, 1917.

nationwide, but perhaps the true number was as high as 3,000,000. In the end, most of the evaders and deserters were never held accountable, except in a few specific cases.²⁴

North Carolinians had many different reasons for declining their requirement to serve. Fear or cowardice may have played a role in the minds of some. Suspected “cowards,” however, needed to be differentiated from legitimate conscientious objectors and pacifists such as Quakers or other religious pacifists. Political objections towards the war played a role in the objections of others. Many southerners disapproved of northern “militarism” in general and coupled that disapproval with a long-standing mistrust of the federal government. In many cases, the draftees were not criminal by nature and did not seek to break the law by avoiding military service. Rather, many of them had familial obligations, farm work, or some other honorable reason for evading Uncle Sam’s call. Many men also agreed with Representative Kitchin’s conclusions about the war and saw no reason to head off to Europe to fight and possibly die in a European conflict, despite President Wilson’s assertion that the fight was for worldwide democracy.²⁵

Luckily for federal officials, there was no repetition of the widespread rioting or antidraft resistance that was seen during the Civil War, but there were several dramatic cases nationwide and locally in North Carolina where Americans actively resisted being called for service. In the highest profile cases, the Secret Service was called in to investigate. Usually, state government officials tried to explain that these instances were

²⁴ Matthew Peek, “Deserters and Draft Evaders in WWI North Carolina,” NCDCCR Blog, <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2017/12/12/deserters-and-draft-evaders-wwi-north-carolina>; Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 211; Capozzola, *Uncle Sam*, 30.

²⁵ Jeannette Keith, *Rich Man’s War, Poor Man’s Fight: Race, Class, and Power in the Rural South during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1-12; Capozzola, *Uncle Sam*, 29-31.

led by outlying radicals who, they suggested, may have even been financed by German money, although there is little evidence to support that claim. Newspapers reported one high-profile incident in very black-and-white terms where “loyal farmers” in Texas tipped off the government about conspirators who were ready to “shoot conscription officers” rather than face the draft. Draft resistance in North Carolina turned aggressive only a handful of times. Two instances in North Carolina mountain counties had the opportunity to turn into serious, or even deadly, events.²⁶

The first, in Mitchell County, North Carolina, occurred in May 1918 when over a dozen men who were at camp went home on furlough leave from their training but failed to return on time. Most of these thirteen men returned peacefully to their unit. Local police and the sheriff were called on to capture the remaining slackers, but the local law enforcement officers either could not, or probably would not, make any serious attempts to find them. One of the thirteen men who had already returned told the chairman of the draft board for Mitchell County that he had been “anxious to return to camp” in order to avoid punishment. The board official, Mr. McAbee, hatched a plan to convince this man to go out and let the other men know that if they returned voluntarily, McAbee would go with them back to their training camp and ask for lenient treatment, or even for no punishment at all.²⁷

Army Major John D. Langston unofficially charged the Mitchell County law enforcement officers with being either “grossly negligent or in sympathy with the

²⁶ “Uprising Against Army Bill Nipped in Bud by Officers,” *Wilmington Dispatch*, May 20, 1917.

²⁷ *Final Report of the Provost Marshal General to the Secretary of War on the Operations of the Selective Service System to July 15, 1919* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), 287-288.

deserters” for failure to adequately and immediately apprehend the men. Major Langston indicated that he believed the situation was far worse than had been reported to the federal government. He sought out assistance from special operatives in the Department of Justice to bring the Mitchell County men back into line. The major’s worries turned out to be unfounded and the special operatives were not needed. The deserters from this county either returned or surrendered voluntarily and were brought in without major incident.²⁸

While the Mitchell County instance ended peacefully, the most notorious case in North Carolina took place a month later in Ashe County in June 1918. When forty drafted men refused to answer their conscription call, the local officials determined that a general round-up was the best option to collect the deserters in this county. The deserters armed themselves and gathered to resist their call to arms in a standoff that culminated on June 24. When officials moved in to arrest the slackers, one deserter and one civilian ended up being killed. The state reserve militia out of Winston-Salem was ordered to hold itself ready for a week in case the Ashe County deserters continued to resist. The governor determined that any use of force against North Carolinian deserters should be a last resort, “after all other methods have failed.” Between fifteen and twenty men may have died resisting the draft around the United States during the war, including at least these two men in North Carolina.²⁹

²⁸ “Fire Broadside Against Sheriffs,” *Franklin Times*, May 31, 1918.

²⁹ Bandel, *North Carolina*, 26-27; *Carolina Watchman*, June 26, 1918; Capozzola, *Uncle Sam*, 30; *Final Report of the Provost Marshal*, 288; “Gov. Bickett Talks to Ash County People,” *Mount Airy News*, July 4, 1918.

Governor Thomas Bickett made a special trip to Ashe County to address the crisis. As soon as those deserters in Mitchell County were advised of their duties, they returned voluntarily. Bickett believed the same would be true in Ashe County. He asked that news of his visit be sent to every “nook and corner” of the county and special efforts be made to ensure friends and relatives of all of the deserters be in attendance. After his arrival, Bickett announced to the people of Ashe County, “I come to you today to save and not destroy.” He delivered a thoughtful, compassionate, and uplifting speech to the “men of the mountains.” The governor told the crowd that he believed in his heart that the deserters were misinformed and that is why they left. He believed that their actions were based on “ignorance and false information.” Bickett spoke to the crowd about militarism in Germany as the major cause of the war in the first place and assured them that Wilson was no Kaiser. The president only wanted to keep the world from falling to a militarist government and make the world safe for democracy. Within two weeks of the governor’s arrival, the situation was quelled, and virtually all of the Ashe deserters returned to camp.³⁰

“Every deserter,” Governor Bickett noted in Ashe County, “is the son or grandson of a man who deserted the Confederate Army.” The South had a longstanding tradition of desertion. Common white southerners deserted from the Confederate army during the Civil War, and by the time the war was no longer in doubt, they did so by the thousands. Over one hundred thousand southerners officially deserted from the Confederate army.

³⁰ “Bickett’s Mission,” *Wilmington Dispatch*, June 29, 1918; “Bickett and the Ashe County Case Address,” *Papers of Bickett*, 174; “Gov. Bickett Talks to Ash County People,” *Mount Airy News*, July 4, 1918; *Final Report of the Provost Marshal*, 287-288.

This desertion is typically downplayed in popular and academic sources, but its impact was significant. Governor Bickett asserted that a lack of consequences for deserters from the Civil War had convinced many Tar Heels in 1918 that they only needed to wait out the draft in hiding, and afterwards, they could then go back to their lives as if nothing happened at all. Shifty North Carolina politicians also suggested that the draft, among other things, would make the Democratic Party unpopular enough for a new Republican administration to be elected, which would issue a general amnesty for all deserters.³¹

The general amnesty argument from those politicians was seen by others as nothing but political bluster. Newspapers reported on the severe consequences that awaited any draft dodger. The president's proclamation made clear that anyone who failed to register for the selective service draft would be subject to imprisonment of up to one year depending on the excuse offered. Even men too ill to present themselves for registration were required to make appropriate arrangements for an agent to register them on their behalf. And anyone who would be out of town on registration day was required to mail in their registration or otherwise make arrangements to complete the process. No message being put out by the federal government should have led ordinary people to believe a new administration would be lenient on them if they failed to sign up for the draft.³²

³¹ Mark Weitz, *More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), ix; Keith, *Rich Man's War*, 2; Thomas Bickett to Newton Baker, July 10, 1918, *Papers of Bickett*, 350-351.

³² "Year's Imprisonment for Those Failing to Register for Army Draft on June 5," *Brevard News*, June 1, 1917.

Active resistance was, of course, an aberration, and not the norm. By mid-July, newspapers reported that there were as many as 138 deserters in Wake County, for example, compared to the 40 or fewer from Ashe County. Mitchell and Ashe only got so much attention because of the armed resistance. Most slackers passively resisted by hiding, running away, or some other method. Many others were just ignorant of their obligations according to several southern governors, especially in the cases of many African Americans. More than ninety-five thousand men across the South were officially labelled deserters. Southern governors and other leaders usually explained the desertion of most of these men as a series of misunderstandings. The governors said the men did not know they had to show up to the local draft boards because they were from rural areas with poor communication channels. Former Lieutenant Governor William C. Newland asserted that most North Carolinian slackers would make “the finest type of soldier once their duties were clearly explained to them.” African American draft evaders were usually described as too stupid to understand that they were drafted at all. By attributing desertion to ignorance or inexperience, rather than some kind of malice, southern authorities could maintain their reputations as patriots and also salvage the reputations of those deserters for later service in the army.³³

These arguments were applied specifically in North Carolina too, but not nearly as many Tar Heels deserted as in the rest of the southern United States. Most North Carolinians, however, were simply not accustomed to the military discipline necessary

³³ “News Review of the Past Week,” *Polk County News*, July 12, 1918; Keith, *Rich Man’s War*, 179-184; “The Slacker,” *Roanoke Beacon*, May 31, 1918.

for a modern army in 1917. Many did show up for training in “boot camp” but quickly found the lifestyle of the army disagreeable, so they simply wandered off and returned home, or they hid from draft enforcers near their homes. These tactics were especially easy for men from rural areas who could hide out in the mountains until they were forgotten, or the war ended, whichever came first, they believed. Whatever their personal reasons might be, these men became known in official and unofficial channels as “slackers.” More than 480,000 total Tar Heels registered for the selective service draft. Roughly 1,600 of these draftees refused to answer Uncle Sam’s call to service, although the true number may never be fully known. However, 62,557 of the drafted men did go to training, did swear in, and became soldiers, sailors, or Marines, or were otherwise discharged from their service requirement for medical or family reasons.³⁴

Most county draft boards around the country created “slacker lists” to note who these men were and where they were from. The slacker lists were in direct opposition to what President Wilson called the “lists of honor,” or the registration lists. The “lists of honor” appeared in newspapers around North Carolina. They alphabetically prepared the names of all registrants in their readership districts so that their loved ones and neighbors could spot them instantly. Of course, the names were segregated. The slacker lists documented the names, ages, hometowns, registration, and actions taken against the offender, if any. Not every man who made it onto a slacker list automatically became a

³⁴ *Final Report of the Provost Marshal*, 19, 97; Bandel, *North Carolina*, 37; Ray S. Baker and William E. Dodd, eds. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 6 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925-1927), 5: 39; David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 150. Earlier versions of the *Report of the Provost Marshal* incorrectly indicate the number of men called to serve as 60,822. This number is probably from a report with many names missing. 62,557 is the updated and more accurate number of drafted North Carolina servicemen.

criminal. In many cases, the potential draftee had his registration cancelled for some reason or another. Due to insufficient federal information, men would register in the wrong county or might register, but have the enrollment cancelled because they were underage or sick in some way. White and black men showed up about equally on these lists in North Carolina, although across the South, black men made up about sixty percent of the total number. Furthermore, in terms of percentages, black men had a higher rate of desertion than whites, due to the overall numbers of white and black men in North Carolina. However, “slacking” in general was the aberration. North Carolina’s desertion rate was well below the rates from the rest of the South and was even or lower than the rest of the nation’s percentage. Indeed, by percentage, white North Carolinians had the lowest rate of desertion in the entire South.³⁵

The American military that did go to war was an obsolete one. It was organized along pre-1914 lines and was severely underequipped, as demonstrated during the Mexican border crisis one year prior to America’s entry into the World War. For a war marked by the introduction of tanks (in 1916) and the large-scale use of poison gas in combat (in 1915), the United States was devoid of its own tanks or gas masks. There were roughly 742 field guns and 43 heavy guns in the country, and they all lacked sufficient ammunition to go to war. The army had fewer than 2,000 machine guns, and the ones it did possess were mostly out of date. The air force, if it can be called such,

³⁵ Deserter List for Wake County, North Carolina, United States Selective Service Board, June 6, 1918, World War I Papers, Military Collection, State Archives of North Carolina; Keith, *Rich Man’s War*, 5, 179; *Second Report of the Provost Marshal General to the Secretary of War on the Operations of the Selective Service System to December 20, 1918* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 461; *Final Report of the Provost Marshal*, 19, 97.

consisted of a handful of “assorted flying machines,” ill-equipped for use on any battlefield. Most American recruits trained with broomsticks as replacement guns. The American navy faced similar shortcomings. Most ships were in need of repairs and only one in ten was fully manned with a sufficient amount of sailors. Just as the army was not ready to face the new realities of twentieth-century war, lacking tanks and gas masks, the navy had no experience with anti-submarine warfare, which would be its main task. Military leadership was also inadequately prepared for a modern war.³⁶

Despite the American military’s obvious inadequacies, the United States was at war after April 1917 and had to prepare appropriately. Training camps for new soldiers were set up throughout the country, including three in North Carolina: Camp Greene near Charlotte, Camp Bragg near Fayetteville, and Camp Polk near Raleigh. These training camps were not specifically established for North Carolinians, but there were certainly many Tar Heels who trained at them. In fact, many North Carolinian draftees and volunteers went to other states to train. For example, National Guard volunteers from North Carolina were sent to South Carolina’s Camp Sevier for their training.³⁷

No training camp was the same as another, despite the uniform nature that military discipline requires. Camp Bragg eventually evolved into the largest military training facility in the entire country. Camp Polk became one of the nation’s few training

³⁶ John P. Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914-1917* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 189-190; Paul Koistinen, *Mobilizing for Modern War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865-1919* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1997), 109-111.

³⁷ LeRae Umfleet, “North Carolina and the Great War Centennial,” NCDCCR Blog, September 8, 2016, <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2016-09-07/north-carolina-and-great-war-centennial>; Bandel, *North Carolina*, 28-29.

centers during the Great War for tank crews, a very new weapon of war in 1917. The camps became small cities and developed their own personalities. Camp Greene, for example, hosted about forty thousand soldiers just outside of Charlotte. This camp, like many others, established its own newspaper, *The Caduceus*. But unlike other camp papers, this paper focused specifically on daily life at Camp Greene, as opposed to the national news and war updates found in others. The paper both informed and entertained the soldiers. It included cartoons and history lessons, as well as information on maintaining proper hygiene.³⁸

Black Tar Heels contributed to the military too, albeit in a segregated fashion. Newspapers reported that although government leaders initially feared that black men would try to evade the draft, they “crowded about the polls anxious to get their names on the list of honor.” Indeed, African Americans served at arms in every war fought by the United States in its history. Many black leaders in the early twentieth century, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, urged African Americans to “close ranks” during the Great War. Perhaps naively, Du Bois believed that if African Americans showed their “loyalty during this time of trial,” that they would be rewarded by the rest of America for their service once the war came to an end. President Wilson pledged to make the world safe for democracy, and America was part of the world, after all. Other black leaders were not

³⁸ *The Caduceus*, May 25, 1918; Bandel, *North Carolina*, 28-31; Herbert White, “Camp Greene,” *Our State*, July 29, 2014, <https://www.ourstate.com/camp-greene/>.

so optimistic. They believed that it was hypocritical for Wilson to make claims about promoting democracy while relegating black Americans to second-class status.³⁹

For most African Americans, though, the war meant very little at all, at least initially. Like their white neighbors in North Carolina, the war and the complexities of European politics were confusing but remained a world away. It was not until the Selective Service Act was passed that many black Americans began to pay attention. African Americans were not exempt from the draft despite the wishes of several southern politicians, including Claude Kitchin and James Vardaman. Many white southern leaders were terrified at the idea of a black man in uniform. For practical reasons, they feared that the South might lose its cheap black laborers to the army, where men like Kitchin dreaded that the new soldiers might even learn ideas above their second-class station in the South. Even more worrying to southern whites, upon joining the army, black men would be trained for war, and they might use that training to defend the new ideas they learned. Kitchin and his allies fought hard against including African Americans in the selective service draft for these reasons but ultimately lost. One of the compromises offered to southerners like Kitchin was that army and navy units would be segregated.⁴⁰

Upon American entry to the war, about ten thousand black men were regulars in the army, and with black inclusion in the draft, those numbers increased. Almost three hundred thousand African Americans registered for the selective service draft. Many who

³⁹ “Roll of Honor of Men of Wilmington in Present Crisis,” *Wilmington Dispatch*, June 8, 1917; Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience during World War I* (New York: Roman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011), 16-17.

⁴⁰ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 158.

joined or were drafted would ultimately be relegated to manual labor and mundane tasks far away from white eyes that were “allergic to the sight” of a black man in uniform. This situation was not remarkably different from the military roles reserved for black soldiers in previous American conflicts. The military in 1917 resembled the American public, where segregation was still the norm, whether *de facto* or *de jure*. There were black units that fought in France, such as the famous Harlem Hellfighters, and in fact, the first American units to see active combat were black units. However, most African American soldiers would be sent to guard duty in the Philippines, Hawaii, or on the Mexican border, far away from the battlefields of Europe.⁴¹

More than twelve thousand Native Americans served in the American military during the Great War. Although their legal status as American citizens was in question for many years before the war, the arguments denying their citizenship conveniently disappeared after war was declared. Thousands of American Indians from many different tribes were drafted, but many more volunteered. In North Carolina, the superintendent to the Eastern Band of Cherokee expected every Cherokee to report for induction if their draft number was called. Unlike African American soldiers, these Cherokee were assigned to white units, with several even rising to the rank of non-commissioned officer. One of the most famous roles for American Indians in the First World War, although not nearly as famous as those from the Second World War, was in the role of code talking. The Eastern Band of Cherokee were called on during the Somme Offensive in 1918 to

⁴¹ Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 2, 53; Keith, *Rich Man's War*, 121-122.

speaking their own language to relay messages between American officers. American leadership figured that there were no Germans who knew the Cherokee language, so there would be no way to capture the message. That proved to work very well. After a German officer was captured, he reportedly begged his captors to reveal what language he had heard.⁴²

It took nearly a year of preparations and training after the preparedness campaign of 1915 to 1916 to get American Doughboys ready to fight on the Western Front. By the spring of 1918, the exhausted British and French welcomed fresh American soldiers with open arms. The United States participated in a number of battles across northern France including at Cantigny, Chateau-Thierry, and Belleau Wood, among many others. North Carolinians served in every major battle on the Western Front in 1918, most famously in the Meuse-Argonne campaign, which was the last major American offensive of the war. The American Doughboys proved to be an instrumental asset in turning back the final German offensive, known as the Spring Offensive, or *Kaiserschlacht*. However, American military officers committed many of the same tactical and strategic mistakes that the French, British, and German officers made many years prior, but by late 1918, the German army was too exhausted to continue fighting. The Allied nations achieved victory on November 11 of that year.⁴³

⁴² Bandel, *North Carolina*, 82-83; Olivia B. Waxman, “‘We Became Warriors Again’: Why World War I Was a Surprisingly Pivotal Moment for American Indian History,” *Time Magazine*, November 23, 2018, <https://time.com/5459439/american-indians-wwi/>.

⁴³ William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 459; Marshall, *Memories*, 170; Edward M. Coffman, *The Regulars: The American Army, 1898-1941* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 202-231; Jörn Leonard, *Pandora's Box: A History of the First World War*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: The Belknap Press

Henry Gunther was the last American killed in the Great War. He was a native of Maryland. Perhaps his family knew the group of North Carolinians who lived in Baltimore and wrote letters and sent telegrams to Claude Kitchin in 1915 and 1916. Gunther charged toward a German roadblock with his bayonet fixed about a minute before the armistice took effect. The Germans manning the post knew of the impending armistice and tried to wave him off, but he fired one or two shots and they responded with a short burst of machine gun fire that killed Gunther instantly. At 11:00 am local time, guns fell silent across Europe for the first time in a little over four years. A staggering twenty-nine North Carolinians died before 10:59 am on November 11.⁴⁴

Though it was somewhat expected, the armistice caught most Americans off guard. By early November 1918, many newspapers were already publishing material that suggested the war was just about over. The general sentiment in North Carolina was a desire for a return to normalcy. Advertisements in the papers were trying to sell families goods based on the feeling that their sons would be home soon and needed to relax after their experience “over there.” There was some celebration, but mostly, it seemed that ordinary Tar Heels were just excited that the United States won. President Wilson’s black-and-white war ended with the good side as the victor.⁴⁵

of Harvard University Press, 2018), 740-792. For a full account of North Carolinian participation in the battles in France and Belgium, Jackson Marshall’s *Memories of World War I* is the most reliable source.

⁴⁴ Joseph E. Persico, *Eleventh Month, Eleventh Day, Eleventh Hour: Armistice Day, 1918: World War I and Its Violent Climax* (New York: Random House, 2004), 351; Matthew Peek, “North Carolinians Respond to the Armistice, November 11, 1918, NCDCCR Blog Post, <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2018/11/11/north-carolinians-respond-armistice-november-11-1918>.

⁴⁵ “Pitt County and the State Goes Overwhelmingly for Democracy Again as Usual,” *Farmville Enterprise*, November 8, 1918; “Germany Accepts Allies Terms,” *Alamance Gleaner*, November 14, 1918.

When soldiers on the battlefields of Europe heard about the armistice, many were shocked. Some doughboys stood in a stupor, careful not to get their hopes up. There were still battles being fought until 10:59 am. But the confusing trance soon turned to jubilation across the continent, and indeed, the world. At the end of a cataclysm that was seldom seen in the world, it would be difficult to find an adequate way to celebrate. Some men cried, some cheered, but for many, there was a relief that they made it through with their lives. Of course, it is impossible to accurately account for the total number of men and women who were dead, missing, or wounded during the Great War. North Carolina sent 86,457 soldiers to fight for the United States. Of those men, 828 were killed and 3,655 were wounded. An additional 1,542 died from various diseases during their time in service, mostly from the influenza pandemic. Estimates of around twenty million dead and twenty-one million wounded worldwide are our best modern estimates. The American dead totaled 116,708. Those soldiers and sailors who came home would have to find a way to make the war make sense to them. For all of Wilson's blustering speeches about making the world safe for democracy, it was up to the individual soldiers to reconcile the hardships they faced in Europe.⁴⁶

When the fighting drew to a close, Kitchin began to lose his influence and voice in Congress. Wilson was desperate to win the peace and called for the mid-term elections of 1918 to be a solid referendum of American confidence in his policies, which

⁴⁶ Marshall, *Memories*, 151-170; R.D.W. Connor, *North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1929), 544-545; Philip Haythornthwaite, *The World War One Source Book* (London: Arms and Armour, 1992), 382-383. The 86,457 North Carolinian servicemen number is the total of both volunteers and draftees. The number reported earlier (62,557) only represents drafted servicemen.

ultimately backfired. The Democrats lost their majority, and by the turn of the decade, Kitchin delivered his final major political speech. He spent his time defending the Wilson Administration and berating his Republican colleagues. The fighting ended but the peace treaty took a long time to write. Wilson spent many months in Paris working on the details with David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, Vittorio Orlando, and representatives from nearly every nation on Earth. Republicans grew impatient and demanded a quicker resolution. Kitchin, for a change, supported Wilson. While delivering a speech of support on April 9, 1920, Kitchin recognized something was wrong. He rushed back to his office to rest, but years of high blood pressure and stress finally accomplished what no Republican could: a stroke permanently disabled him.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *Raleigh News and Observer*, April 10, 1920; Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), 3-16, 273-278.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: KITCHIN AND POSTWAR NORTH CAROLINA, 1919-1923

ARMISTICE SIGNED, END OF THE WAR!

--*New York Times* headline, November 11, 1918

In April 1920, Claude Kitchin suffered the first in a series of strokes and his health became worse. He suffered from influenza, vertigo, dizziness, and headaches all while trying to carry on his duties in the House of Representatives. He saw numerous doctors, at least one who was a quack and was later arrested for practicing medicine without a license. He even underwent a surgery to remedy his ailments, but nothing could fix the problems caused by the stroke other than temporary relief from the dizziness. In late May of 1923, he entered a hospital in Wilson, North Carolina. His condition fluctuated for several weeks with some improvement early on, but he deteriorated quickly. Then, on May 31, he passed away with Maria, a younger brother, and two of his children at his bedside. His funeral was held on June 1 in Scotland Neck, his hometown.¹

The subject of this dissertation is foremost America's entry to the Great War from the viewpoint of North Carolina and the preparedness measures undertaken by the federal government between 1914 and 1917, but significantly, the specter of Claude Kitchin haunts every page. Kitchin is a largely forgotten figure today, and the fading of his

¹ "Rep. Kitchin is now Taking Rest Cure," *Concord Times*, May 3, 1923; "State News in Digest," *Hertford County Herald*, May 25, 1923; "Condition of Claude Kitchin is Worse," *Concord Daily Tribune*, May 29, 1923; "Kitchin Still Critically Ill," *Roxboro Courier*, May 30, 1923; "Rep. Kitchin Died Early Today After Lingering Illness," *Concord Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1923.

memory began almost as soon as the war ended. The Sixty-Sixth Congress was sworn into office many months before the final armistice was signed. The Republican Party regained the majority for the first time in almost a decade. Kitchin became the Democrat's Minority Leader in the Sixty-Seventh Congress and served as head of the Democratic Caucus until 1923, albeit in a behind the scenes role due to his condition, but the Democrats had lost even more seats by that point. Kitchin faded into relative obscurity in his final years of service, largely due to his health concerns, and became almost as obscure as he had been in the years before the war. He had no more war to rage against, nor a major leadership position to give him the pulpit to do so.¹

Kitchin's obscurity needs to be rectified. He played a crucial role as the loudest voice of opposition to American involvement in the European war. Other scholars have noted that Tom Watson should fill that role as the "loudest" opponent of the war but this perspective overlooks the fact that Watson had no influence over any political policy in the 1910s. He could persuade the public through the newspapers but that comes nowhere near the power that Kitchin held. The office of the Majority Leader has been characterized as second in power only to the presidency and that held true in 1917. Kitchin voted against entering the war, but the president persuaded enough of Congress to vote in favor of America's entry. After Kitchin died, his memorial address was well received by his contemporaries. Kitchin's colleagues in Congress remembered him as a fierce opponent and loyal ally. President Wilson referred to Kitchin as "that distinguished

¹ "Cameron Morrison Our Next Governor," *Polk County News*, November 5, 1920; "For First Time in 70 Years Michigan Elects Democrat to United States Senate," *Goldsboro News*, November 9, 1922.

stubborn North Carolinian who when he made up his mind would never open it.” Like the president he so often butted heads with, a stroke took him out of the public’s eye but did not stop him from fulfilling his role in office. Wilson’s final months were obviously much more controversial with Edith Wilson serving as a “presidential steward,” while Kate Kitchin served no such role. Kitchin seemed to slowly wither away after suffering from his stroke.²

From a twenty-first century perspective, Claude Kitchin’s adherence to white supremacy might make him a controversial, even odious figure. He never would have had the opportunity to oppose American entry to the First World War, without the race-based electioneering that helped send him to Congress in the first place. Previous books, articles, and theses have left out too much of the “bad stuff” from Kitchin’s rise to national prominence. When I began working on this topic, I assumed he was a typical southern racist, but did not anticipate the severity of his actions. He directly and indirectly participated in the disfranchisement of African Americans, as well as violence taken to achieve this action. Kitchin, like many of his southern colleagues, would almost certainly never have been elected to public office if not for these methods.

Alex Arnett said the following about studying Kitchin:

A study of the career of Claude Kitchin impresses one with the historian’s obligation to rectify the distorted impressions of him created in his day by the press and other agencies of propaganda and adequately to recognize his importance and worth. He has been almost ignored by historians and all but forgotten by the public. Few histories of his period mention his name, and none

² Margaret B. Klapthor and Allida M. Black, *The First Ladies* (Washington D.C.: White House Historical Association, 2001), 65; William E. Hazelgrove, *Madam President: The Secret Presidency of Edith Wilson* (Washington D.C.: Regency Publishing, 2016), Chapter 21; Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World, 1913-1921* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

accords him adequate recognition. In so far as he is remembered at all by the public, he is doubtless thought of in most cases as he was caricatured by malignant propaganda.³

Arnett was partially correct, although his choice of wording is poor. Part of this dissertation's purpose is to set the record straight concerning Kitchin's actions but not just against the press or propaganda wings. Arnett's own biography of Kitchin completely ignored the driving force behind Kitchin's election to Congress. Kitchin has been ignored by the historical community, though, and for far too long. He elicits only minor references in most works concerning America and the Great War.

In the course of researching Claude Kitchin, I initially did not intend to conduct official family interviews, but the opportunity presented itself to exchange a few thoughts with some of his family members. I have had the privilege of connecting with several decedents of Cap'n Buck Kitchin. Of those who shared their time, several were rather annoyed that the only existing biography of Kitchin got key information wrong about the family's story and seemed unhappy with Arnett's treatment of Kitchin in general. A historian should remain evenhanded about his or her subject in any case. Claude Kitchin's great-great granddaughter shared the following with me when asked if she had any comment or thought to share about her political ancestor:

Claude Kitchin and William Walton Kitchin should only be recuperated so as to remind ourselves of their fervent commitment not only to the ideology of white supremacy but also to utilizing every political means at their disposal to maintain a racial caste system, both in North Carolina and the nation at large. Through a

³ Alex Mathews Arnett, "Claude Kitchin Versus the Patrioteers," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 14, no. 1 (January 1937): 20.

detailed historical account of the how and why of their machinations, including voter fraud and disenfranchisement, we might begin to confront the inequitable truths of our past and the ways in which they structure our present. As a descendant of Claude and William, I use the knowledge I have uncovered about their shameful beliefs and actions as a catalyst to work on behalf of racial justice. For me, there is nothing positive about their political legacies but instead a series of lessons about the dehumanizing havoc wreaked by white patriarchal power.⁴

This dissertation brings the Kitchens “back to life” by remembering the good and the bad deeds of Claude Kitchin.

Public history continues to ignore Kitchin. A few examples are worth noting. On August 2, 2014, the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources’ World War Centennial Committee launched the state’s four-year-long centennial commemoration with a wreath-laying ceremony at the North Carolina Veterans Monument. What began as an obscure assassination in an even more obscure part of the world one hundred years earlier launched the United States into the twentieth century, as it did for many nations around the world. America participated in Old World politics with its system of entangling alliances, blind nationalism, and encroaching militarism for the first time in 1917. President Wilson assured Americans that they would be fighting to make the world safe for democracy, in the so called “war to end all wars.” That proved not to be true. Many historians argue that the long nineteenth century ended with the First World War. The war undermined the old European order and created new national borders in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The very nature of war changed with more efficient methods of killing people. The worldwide role for women also changed by allowing them

⁴ Email exchange with Emily Ruth Rutter, December 7, 2019; Email exchange with Sue M. Travis, September 18-19, 2019; Telephone conversation with Musette Steck, September 29, 2019.

into the sphere that had for so long been reserved for men. North Carolina experienced many of these changes too. The state became less rural, more worldly, and a better industrial power in the country. However, the focus of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources commemoration activities does not truly give a loud enough voice to the opposition.⁵

The North Carolina Museum of History displayed an exhibit in Raleigh for the better part of two years between 2017 and 2018. Over six hundred thousand students, history buffs, looky-loos, and others experienced what it was like to “step in the boots” of a Tar Heel doughboy during World War I. The exhibit won awards for its recreation of a trench warfare environment. Guests were able to walk through the simulated battlefield while reading and seeing images of life in the trenches, complete with examples of weapons, uniforms, machinery, vehicles, food, and sandbags. Even the information that was not directly related to life as a soldier revolved around supporting the war effort. And again, at this museum, there was a true lack of acknowledgement of those North Carolinians who did not support entry to the war. Claude Kitchin was not featured in this exhibit but that is not surprising. It is more difficult to get students interested in the anti-preparedness forces of Congress rather than a simulated trench experience.⁶

The earliest stages of this dissertation were constructed with the same thoughts in mind. When one ponders the turbulent decade from a century ago, the World War should

⁵ “North Carolina in World War I Blog,” NCDCCR Blog Post, <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blogs/world-war-i>; David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), xiii-xxii, 489-498.

⁶Christa Gala, “For Him, Teaching Museum Visitors about World War I is Personal,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, October 19, 2017; Personal observations by author.

jump out as the watershed moment in the careers of so many politicians, and for ordinary people also. So much ink has been spilled over the causes, course, and outcomes of the war, but not enough yet has come from those voices of opposition. Unlike America's involvement in the Second World War, its declaration of war in April 1917 was not the result of any single overt action. Rather, a series of incidents, together with various economic and political concerns, eventually led the country into the Great War. Most often, we cite unrestricted German submarine warfare, the Zimmermann Telegram's provocation of Mexican American distrust, news of the Russian Revolution, and the realization that American involvement in the war would lead to a greater influence on the postwar settlement when it concluded. The truth is in all of these reasons, because there was no single factor. Pointing to the destruction of the *Lusitania* is an easy ploy to explain America's entry into the war, but that simple explanation fails to recognize many additional factors, including the amount of time between the sinking and the declaration of war.⁷

It is easy to wonder today, as it was over one hundred years ago, why any North Carolinian would, or even should, support a war that was an ocean away. Tar Heels across the state would have looked at their newspapers and scoffed at the wild goings-on in a small corner of the world where king, emperors, and archdukes were assassinated with seeming regularity. It must have seemed impossible to believe for many of them that such an odd event would lead to almost eighty-seven thousand of North Carolina's young

⁷ John P. Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914-1917* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 189-195.

men being called to fight. President Wilson's rhetoric about patriotism and democracy obviously spoke to many. We can see today many of the same arguments that were employed about supporting the president's foreign affairs endeavors, despite our collective understanding of their origins. Americans have a history of equating military service, or supporting the military, with patriotism which seems a strange phenomenon for a democratic republic, although similar ideas date back to the ancient Greeks. But this idea, like many modern ideas of patriotism, was born during America's preparations for entering the Great War. Coercive volunteerism, an idea born during the preparedness movement, is still with us today.

It is often perilous to draw parallels between different eras. History never repeats itself as plainly as some fairy tale beginning, "Twice upon a time . . ." Events are unique; yet, meaningful patterns do exist and ought to be examined for the insights that they can offer. I have tried, not always successfully, to monitor the parallels I draw between different time frames in this dissertation. I compared Kitchin to those that came before him not necessarily to suggest, "this is how the South always was . . ." but rather to illuminate patterns that may have influenced Kitchin's motives and worldview. While history does rhyme often, it never repeats itself; otherwise, historians are but entertainers rather than educators.⁸

There is no "official list" of numbers or names for those North Carolinians killed in service during the Great War. Those records were kept at the federal level, but an

⁸ Frank L. Holt, *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan* (California: University of California Press, 2006), xii.

unfortunate fire at the repository in St. Louis in 1973 has made determining the true number very difficult. The military collection archivist at the State Archives of North Carolina, Matthew Peek, notes that newspaper reports of deaths in most wars are notoriously inaccurate. But to answer the question, Peek and the North Carolina WWI Centennial Committee, along with a number of volunteers, compiled a list starting in 2013, although admittedly it is not 100 percent accurate. However, it is the best available source for death records in the state. This project concluded that 2,188 North Carolinians is the tally, but there are possibly more names to be collected for this list. After the war ended, soldiers had to return to normalcy as best as they could. North Carolina attempted to gather as much information from its returning soldiers as possible. Fewer records than expected survive today, especially for servicemen of color. The veterans who came home did not talk too much about their experiences for many decades. Scholars like Jackson Marshall were able to glean much from interviews conducted in the 1980s, but in the immediate post-war years, few veterans talked much about their experiences during the war.⁹

As much as things changed after the war ended, they also seemed to stay the same. The federal government's power expanded, but for the average citizen it was a return to the status quo. White soldiers and sailors returned to their civilian pursuits. Black Americans returned to their status as second-class citizens. The United States did

⁹ R. Jackson Marshall, *Memories of World War I: North Carolina Doughboys on the Western Front* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1998); Matthew Peek and LeRae Umfleet, "List of North Carolina's Dead WWI Service Individuals," NCDCCR Blog, November 15, 2018. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2018/11/15/list-north-carolinas-dead-wwi-service-individuals>. This list is a downloadable Microsoft Excel sheet. The number of total dead North Carolinians is conflicted in nearly every source.

not join the League of Nations, and the country returned to normalcy, that is, America returned to the isolationist policies that President Washington urged over a century earlier and that Claude Kitchin tried, in some measure, to preserve.

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